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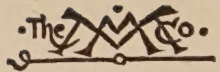
# THIS FINE-PRETTY WORLD

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# THIS FINE-PRETTY WORLD

*A Comedy of the Kentucky Mountains*

BY

PERCY MACKAYE

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1924
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Set up and printed. Published December, 1923.

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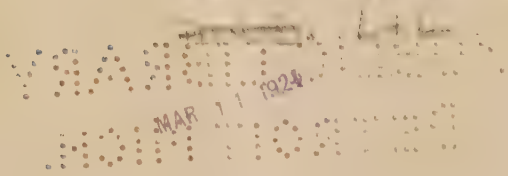


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To

MARION MORSE MACKAYE

IN GLAD REMEMBRANCE OF

"THE HIGH PEAKS AND THE LOW GAPS"

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN

TRAIL-FELLOWS

THIS PLAY IS FONDLY

DEDICATED

# NOTE

THIS play is one of a group of plays by the author, dealing with various phases of life in the Kentucky Mountains. Those phases differ widely according to the measure in which the life there has been invaded by influences of the outer world.

In emphasis this play is concerned with aspects of the mountian world uninvaded by modernity—aspects of human nature untamed and unsophisticated. It is concerned with folk comedy. Others of the group deal with the contrast of two worlds irreconcilable in their dominant aspects. Their emphasis is one of tragedy, or pathos, in dealing with phases of the inexorable disintegration of an ancient world.

No one play can attempt to deal with these varied aspects of the epical moment which is now transpiring in our mountains.

This play, therefore, though the first to be published because of its earlier production, has been conceived and executed in relation to the group of which it is a part, and all, of course, in relation to the human functions of drama.

In "This Fine-Pretty World" the comedy of human nature is not circumscribed by mountain palings.

*Cast of the Play as first produced in New York, at the Neighborhood Playhouse, December 26, 1923*

## THIS FINE-PRETTY WORLD

*A Comedy of the Kentucky Mountains*

*By* PERCY MACKAYE

### PERSONS

*In the Order of Their First Appearance*

BEEM SPRATTLING .....E. J. BALLANTINE
LARK FIDDLER .....JOHN F. ROCHE
GOLDY SHOOP, *a young girl* .....JOANNA ROOS
GRANNY COMBS (*Rhody Melindy*) .....REBA GARDEN
ROOSH MAGGOT, *nephew of Gilly*.....ALBERT CARROLL
GILLY MAGGOT, *an aged "master of hogs"*....PERRY IVINS
MAG MAGGOT, *his wife, daughter of Granny Combs*
ALINE MACMAHON
ARMINTY SPRATTLING, *Beem's wife*..ESTHER MITCHELL
POLLY-ANN CLEMM, *her neighbor*....PAMELA GAYTHORNE
WITTY SHEPHEARD, *from up creek*.....
REASON DAY, *from down creek*.....DAN WALKER
JUDY DISHMAN, *an old "Aunty"*.....POLAIRE WEISSMANN
DUG CHEEK, *High Sheriff*.....
GREEN CORNET, *Squire*.....
ANDY CAUDLE, *foreman*.....
*Other Mountaineers, Men and Women.*

*The Scene is laid in the Kentucky mountains, far beyond railroads, not so long ago.*
*The season is April.*

ACT I.—*Outside the palings of Gilly Maggot's Cabin-yard.*
ACT II.—*Inside the palings of Beem Spratling's Cabin-yard.*
ACT III.—*The Interior of a Log Schoolhouse.*

*The Scenes by* WARREN DAHLER

# PREFACE

"HERE we are in a rough-hewn, old log-cabin in the heart of the mountains: The bob-white's call floats up to us, the creek murmurs, the hollyhocks flash their pink and brilliant stalks. Around, up, and far away—the hills are dusted with the chestnut bloom, which the wind brings to us as faint odors.

"Next door, in the dog-trot, are the looms and spinning-wheels, and going by—the lovely mountain children, so fresh and wild and new. The water splashes into our pitcher, clear and sparkling; the hillsides are strong with great trees; and I hear a child repeating his Sunday text—'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall inherit'—

"In the distant field, with long, crooning lilt, uncertain in its plaintive wildness, speaking of isolation and of meditation, ancestral, real,—breaks the mountain ballad from a childish throat.

"On the porch last night, with yet but one star shining, the murmuring creek—the noises of drowsy birds—the call of the whip-poor-will—and the distant hills drifting into darkness—the dross of life fell away.

"Here is a new world and an old, untouched by the gropings of man for two centuries, unenmeshed

by our faltering blunders, our stumbling existence, the turmoil and moil of our abortive and tangled efforts.—Here is God, humanity and the mountains."

"What a trip that was up and over the ridges!

"I got on to a mule, Blue by name,—uncertain, wavering, undulating,—and there passed into my consciousness the thought of deserts, of camels and veiled houri, of lonely princesses fleeing by night through dark forests on their rocking steeds, as I swayed with Blue's heaving flanks and sudden energy at rocky places.

"By mountain pebbly streams, by lofty cornfields and little roadside cabins we wended. And then—up over rocks and boulders into the forests, emerging on to precipitous sides where far off the glorious juts of mountains stood in blue haze.

"Turning again, still higher, new vistas opened and fresh descents awaited us: Up, up, urging the mules, twisting, grinding among rocks, over great roots and fallen tree-trunks, till we reach the pinnacle, where a fresh spring of such welcome water blessed our efforts.

"I shall not forget that wild journey:—The caravan of mules scrambling in the forest glades and up the tortuous trail; the distant vistas, the rocking motion, the burning heat of tremendous endeavor, and then the last descent of the more cultivated slopes to the settlement—going through the gate, and stopping at our cabin door, in a new-found country, a miracle of loveliness, so fresh, so sweet, so peaceful."

The above excerpts from the trail-journal of my wife, the partner of my travels into remote regions of the Kentucky Mountains far beyond the railroads, record the beginnings of a long-dreamed-of adventure in the realms of creative research, one outcome of which is the present volume.

## A Quest Continued

Our adventure befell in this way. During the autumn of 1920, I was called to a fellowship in poetry and drama at Miami University, in the little town of Oxford, Ohio, a few miles from the border of Kentucky.

By the gracious conditions of this fellowship, the first of its kind in America, it was desired simply that I should continue my own work as a poet and dramatist, informally in touch with the life of the university, where a studio had been built for me in a quiet grove of the campus. So there, in my work, I planned to take up again a design, long since begun, which the busy occupations of crowded years had obliged me to put aside.

That design was to interpret (in plays and poems) certain native American backgrounds of our national life, far from the life of cities, through personal observation of their natural and human characteristics. These mountain backgrounds, conserving distinctive qualities of pioneer traditions which have deeply influenced our character and destiny as a people, are comprised in the east within the range of the Appalachians, extending for fifteen

hundred miles along the recently projected "Appalachian Trail."

As early as 1903 I wrote the first of a group of plays concerning northern phases of that trail country in New England. These, later published as "Yankee Fantasies," have since been acted in many quarters.

But an even richer vein of folk life, only half discovered, imminently menaced but not yet wholly devastated by the inexorable machine of modernism, still held its hidden lure in the mountains southward —especially beyond the hundred-mile wall of Pine Mountain, in Kentucky. Some day I hoped it might be my lucky lot to adventure there, on the rugged trail to the still serene heart of my own people, with the scrip of a pilgrim-dramatist in my belt-strap.

Now, then, in my call to the southwest, that lucky lot had at length befallen me; and after casting backward one more fling in imagination toward my Yankee homeland, with a long narrative poem of old witch days, "Dogtown Common," I turned to a surviving witchcraft in the Kentucky mountains— an enchantment of more than mere superstition— a living reality of human character and lore which itself is fantasy, contrasted with this world of the printing press, whose dominion ends at the "razor back" ridges of those fabulous mountains.

Accordingly, with the close of the University term in June, 1921, I prepared to set out on my quest, with my wife and son, in response to a friendly invitation of the Settlement School at Pine Mountain, Kentucky, to sojourn there as headquarters

from which to make trips of exploration into remote creeks and "bottoms" of the hinterland.

And there we arrived at "Old Log," as described in my wife's journal above.

## Mountain Data

The space of a preface is too narrow for me to attempt any comprehensive account of the varied significances of our sojourn, with its revelations of wild nature in man and mountains. Some hint of these in their important relations to education and our development as a people, I have tried to suggest in a recent article, "Untamed America," * which may perhaps be further developed in a book, if opportunity permits.

It is pertinent, however, to this preface that I should make clear how the contents of this volume are the result of no merely casual interest and observation in regard to the mountain life which I have sought to interpret as a dramatist in the spirit of its own poetry.

During my stay in the mountains I did not trust simply to my memory in retaining observations. Unobtrusively, with my wife's constant assistance, I recorded them in penciled notes, which now comprise several typewritten volumes, which perhaps I may some day deposit in some library for reference. These, which took in themselves several months to arrange and classify, have been substantially the basis for the language used in my plays. Naturally I have used them for creative, not imi-

* *The Survey Graphic,* January, 1924.

tative purposes. In doing so, however, many phrases actually spoken by mountaineers have been incorporated without change in speeches of the play characters, since it has been one motive of the work to conserve the vital idiom of the native speech in its most distinctive forms.

## A Noble Illiteracy

The mountain vocabulary at its best, in exact, specific words, and illuminating images and phrases, is far richer and more flexible than that of the average university graduate; and of course this spoken vocabulary corresponds with an inward richness of thought and imagination.

Descended from Irish, Scotch, and provincial English stocks, these mountaineers have conserved for centuries a tradition of *spoken* language and oral memory, in a dialect which (among the lessening numbers with whom it is still uncontaminate) derives from these varied origins, and is even now —by a kind of mutation—in process of becoming as distinctive a species of language as the Scotch or Lancashire, at the very moment in history when it is doubtless doomed to extinction.

Left alone, it might yet conceivably produce its own Bobby Burns; but of course it will not be left alone. Already for some decades it has been retarded in growth and now is in its quick decadence, through contact with even the spoken language of the outerworld literate.

And with its speedy departure there will depart from the world a noble illiteracy, untamed and

waywardly charming in its racy constructions—adapted with rare plasticity and raison d'etre of their own to the fluid continuity of a speech designed wholly for the uses of the tongue and for the delights of hearing, never for the exactions of the eye, or for the logic of metaphysical grammarians, as our own literate speech has increasingly been warped and harnessed to serve the dumb slaves of the printer's devil.

So, to find it still in full bloom, the dialect lover must tramp the creek-trails for many a mountain mile to discover it flowering, rather shyly (it seems to him, at first), in the lilt of some mountaineer who calls from his log cabin door. But be patient a while. Wait for a sudden freshet of anger, or astonishment, or vehement approbation—then listen how the ancient, luscious phrases revive and uncurl their colorful fronds, like the "deep-damasked" foliage of pied moss in a sunshine shower.

But perhaps the dialect lover will not be patient, nor lucky enough to be caught in a freshet-storm of colloquialism; and so he may turn homeward disconsolate, and report an anemia of native speech in those mountains. That would be quite possible; it would also be superficial.

To deal adequately with the fascinating phases of this mountain speech would require the space of a volume. But this much, at least, I should say, in reference to the dialect forms as used in the mouths of the characters in these plays.

Coming gradually to think in such forms, I have not used any construction for which I have not full

precedent in my recorded observations at first hand. So also, of course, with the dialectical words.

But constructions, phrases, words, are to the poet the plastic substance for the uses of poetic thought, and I have met very few among the illiterate mountaineers who were not genuine "poeters" in their thinking. If, then, I have been able to transmit to my imagined characters something at all comparable to the unsullied poetry and fantasy with which the thought of the mountain people is redolent, I shall be happy in feeling that I have not wholly missed the prime mark of my goal.

### Creative Conservation

In that respect the plan I have undertaken is a pioneering experiment in a new phase of American "conservation," comprehensive of rich human resources, directly related to the large engineering aims of the projected Appalachian Trail referred to above.*

Such Conservation, I suggest, if it is to be worthy of its American birthright, will not stop at conserving merely our backgrounds of physical wild nature, its power-waters and forests with their diversities of bird and plant life. More vitally important to its human goal, it will become also a conservation of spiritual wild nature, with its precious diversities of Man—his distinctive species of soul-

* Some of these aims, and the engineering methods by which they may hopefully be attained, have been set forth recently in two articles by Benton MacKaye: "An Appalachian Trail, A Project in Regional Planning," in *The Journal of the American Institute of Architects,* October, 1921; and "An Appalachian Power Line," in *The Survey Graphic,* February, 1924.

life, his unspoiled heritages of thought and untamed imagination.

This new conservation must, I think, become creative—not simply preservative—of American characteristics (in lore, language, imagination, tang and tradition), if it is to serve the constructive growth of civilization. For human diversity must feed the sources of our increasing standardization in life and thought, to avoid an ultimate sterility of creative power; and in America the elements of human diversity—as these are transmutable through our Anglo-Saxon speech—are still latent in the poetry, legend, music, and unfettered modes of folk thought, which our modern world has not yet erased from regions of the Appalachian mountains.

### An Appalachian Theatre

To conserve, in forms of imagination, some vestiges of that elusive, vibrant life before its inevitable passing, has been the object of my quest.

To this end, as a dramatist concerned with this new type of conservation, I have contemplated *in nubibus* a new kind of theatre as its instrument—new, yet ancient in its implications: A theatre founded upon Diversity versus Standardization; a theatre of the soil, synthetic of our native lores in poetry, legend, music; a theatre of living "spoken" speech, racy, ancient, natively American, undiluted by the ink of the academic or the journalistic; a theatre of reconciliation between society and solitude, between the tamed and the untamable, the eternally social and the eternal-lonely; a theatre of the moun-

tains, dedicated to the untainted springs of imagination by an enlightened public opinion as strong and safeguarding as that which the slogan of "good sportsmanship" has already created for keeping unpolluted the physical waters and trails of our mountain domains; a theatre as far from sophisication as it is near to serenity and wild nature; a *Theatre of the Appalachians.*

How such a potential theatre might become a practical reality is an alluring theme too large for a paragraph. Conceivably the image of it might be left, like a bright mirage of the mountain mists, to beckon some future generation, except that our own is called to create it, or its equivalent, because of an imminent menace. For if ever the sinister diseases of sophistication are to be held in quarantine, a beginning should be made now on the borders of the Appalachian oasis, before the weakening contagions of our literacy are loosed further to ravage inward the pristine vigor of its people, who are the ancestral heart of our nation.

The remedy—if any remedy be not now too late—lies, I think, in a profounder ideal of education than that standardized fetich which is generally reverenced in our schools: an ideal, on the contrary, which shall recognize and duly respect the untamed qualities of character and tradition which inhere in this mountain-born people, and so shall duly beware lest it supplant those dynamic qualities of independence by imitative standards of subservience and a leveling culture. As to this, many earnest and expert minds in America are giving thought to

the problems of mountain education. To such I should like to submit that the creative conservation of poetry in a noble people may be itself a vital concern of educational policy, with which the conception of a Theatre of the Appalachians might well be congruous.

Such a theatre, of course, belongs by its nature in the mountains themselves, but its inception may take place elsewhere, even in the heart of a great city, if there be insight concerning it. As far as my own potential contribution is concerned, this published play is one of a partly completed group, the completion of which has been interrupted by various exigencies during the past two years. The group I hope to complete before long. Meanwhile "This Fine-Pretty World" (finished more than a year ago) come now before the public because of the gracious request of the Neighborhood Playhouse to perform it as their second production of the season 1923-1924. So, through their sympathetic cooperation as artists, this play of remote Kentucky makes its first appearance in New York City, far from the regions and people of its mountain background.

## Envoi

Among many of that friendly people I have exchanged my own thoughts in simple, heartfelt friendship; and if ever this volume shall chance to come to the notice of any of their number, I feel confident they will realize that this and others of my Kentucky plays (however they may embody sug-

gestions derived from the life and lore and names of the mountains) are in no wise to be regarded as true accounts of any actual persons or places in those regions, but are simply—in a kind of actable form —such "antick" stories as old Sol Shell might have told round the winter log-fire to the children of Pine Mountain.

To all those at Pine Mountain who have co-operated to create the beautiful and enlightened Settlement School, where at "Old Log" their friendly hospitality provided my wife and me with the starting point of our mountain pilgrimage, I wish to record here my very hearty appreciation and good will.

And to one on Greasy Creek whose mellow philosophy and religion of poetry and overflowing friendship are the ancient well-springs of restorative life in mountains or lowlands—to Uncle John Fiddler,—I send in affection these "remembrancing" words from the journal of my fellow-pilgrim, written on the autumn day we left him beside his cabin in the mountains:

"He bade us goodbye in the roadway, and we passed on—two happy, blesséd ones.

"In the brown road near the laurel and the stony creek,—yellow and sear against the fresh green,—stood old Uncle John. I shall never forget his exquisite, gaunt, shambling figure, in the faded yellow working trousers and jacket, with the slouched and battered hat brim, his gnarled and trembling hands outspread in deferential benediction—his whole attitude a gracious question, an interrogation of accept-

ance, an exhortation and summing up of a mood which encompassed our whole quality, our complete thoughts of the hours we had spent together—a reverent grace of tender beauty—the rounded lyric of the day."

PERCY MACKAYE.

CORNISH, NEW HAMPSHIRE,
November, 1923.

## PERSONS

*In the Order of Their First Appearance*

BEEM SPRATTLING.
LARK FIDDLER.
GOLDY SHOOP, *a young girl.*
GRANNY COMBS (RHODY MELINDY).
ROOSH MAGGOT, *nephew of Gilly.*
GILLY MAGGOT, *an aged "master of hogs."*
MAG MAGGOT, *his wife, daughter of Granny Combs.*
ARMINTY SPRATTLING, *Beem's wife.*
POLLY-ANN CLEMM, *her neighbor.*
WITTY SHEPHEARD, *from up creek.*
REASON DAY, *from down creek.*
JUDY DISHMAN, *an old "Aunty."*
DUG CHEEK, *High Sheriff.*
GREEN CORNET, *Squire.*
ANDY CAUDLE, *foreman.*

*Other Mountaineers, Men and Women.*

*The Scene is laid in the Kentucky mountains, far beyond railroads, not so long ago.*

*The season is April.*

ACT I.—*Outside the palings of Gilly Maggot's Cabin-yard.*

ACT II.—*Inside the palings of Beem Sprattling's Cabin-yard.*

ACT III.—*The Interior of a Log Schoolhouse.*

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NOTE: *Concerning the mountain speech and songs of the play, a Note is included at the end of this volume.*

# ACT FIRST

"I follers the Oninvisible and the Onbeheerd-of."

# ACT I

*Outside the paling of Gilly Maggot's cabin-yard.*

*In the near foreground a mountain trail emerges from bushes on the right into an open space, in the right-centre background of which stands a tripod of rough sticks, tied with a chain to hold a hanging iron pot. Near by are two or three gum-stump seats.*

*The high weather-worn paling—above which fruit-boughs in blossom show scantly—skirts the back of the scene and curves to the foreground, left, where the trail goes past. Here against the paling, a low, wooden battling-trough, covered with a plank, serves for a bench. A little back of this, in the left middle-ground, a gate in the paling leads in to the yard of the cabin, which is not visible.*

*As the scene opens, two Mountaineers enter from the right along the trail, one preceding the other. The first man,* BEEM SPRATTLING, *has an ageless air of tattered dignity. He enters with a look of dreamy offendedness. The other,* LARK FIDDLER, *is a stalwart, shambling old figure, whose ancient face is radiant with deep-creased and jovial earnestness. Entering after* BEEM, *he calls to him in fond perplexity, waving long-armed gestures of entangled argument.*

LARK

Beem! Listen at me! I'm not scourin' ye.

BEEM

Lie-swearin', you says—me! That scours.

LARK

Hit's that-a-way the mouthy people gash about ye, I says. But I'm confidenced, I says, jest hit's the wild spring o' the year which hit is the Will o' God is workin' the sap in all sin-created flesh.

BEEM

Hit ain't sin is in me; hit's subtlehood.

LARK

And would I baffle ye that to the contrary?

BEEM

Nobody couldn't. I follers the Oninvisible and the Onbeheerd-of. Hit's a down-headed fool can only talk back what he hears. I's up-headed.—I hain't needs to hear a thing to repeat of hit. I hain't needs to smell a thing to inquire after hit.

LARK

That's purely so. You're the inquirin'-afterest-minded man in the county.

BEEM

County? Hmm, Lark Fiddler! Ye'll not sample

of me in a kingdom of counties. Sich another subtlehood like mine is shore perished sence the dyin'-out of the ole Foundationers.

LARK

Ha, boy!

BEEM

[*Putting one foot on a gum-stump, and striking a rapt attitude.*]

Look back away-y-y yander, and behold ye ole George Washing'n and the Lor' Jesus! They war the for'ardest possel o' sharps in the old ancients.—I'll axe ye: Was they subtle?

LARK

Amen!

BEEM

But did they done ary lie-swearin'?

LARK

No, sirrr!

BEEM

I'll axe ye agin: How behappened the Bible and the Constitution?—Hold! I'll tell ye back: They was borned of old outen the imaginary thoughts of them first Foundationers. *They* beheld the oninvisible and declared hit. And what-all would become to releegion and Amerikee without 'em?

LARK

Yea, my orator!

BEEM

Yit *me,* when *I* beholds the oninvisible and declares hit, I's callt a lie-swearer.—So! Is imaginary thoughts lie-swearin'?

LARK

Nowise.

BEEM

Then answer me of this: What-fur doos the world go scourin' *me* of my imaginary thoughts *now,* and hit lettin' *them* to go scoot-free—ole Jesus and George Washing'n—in *them* days?

LARK

Ha, good feller! Nowadays ain't used-to-did.

BEEM

Nay, verily. Nowadays, God's truth in heaven is man's lie on earth.

LARK

But eh, boy: stylish is the opinion *I* holds of ye, Beem Sprattling—a noble opinion! Will ye make up to me now with a shake-hand, will ye?

BEEM

[*Absently giving his hand, which* LARK *presses warmly.*]

Lie-swearin'! Well, let 'em gash on. But I wish

they'd be a machinery could bore a hole in some men's heads to let in the glory of knowledge, stid o' them bein' a pack of divil-fired fools.

LARK

Amen agin to ye!

BEEM

Glory, Uncle Lark,—what-all do the gashin' fools know of hit? But me, walkin' the mountins, or mebbe settin' in jail, or stan'in' here now,—me, jist I lays back in my skullpiece, and stares up yander at my imagical thoughts, like rosy skiffs o' cloud in the dayrise, and ah!—hit's plumb glory, hit is, this fine-pretty world!

LARK

Hit virtuously is. That's a fac', Beem. Sometimes hit'll come to me jist like draps o' water drappin' offen a sickle; sometimes nary a drip.—Hain't your mind ben that-a-way—all gobbled-up dry?

BEEM

Nowise hit hain't. My mind's a clar dreen don't never dry up. [*Sitting down on the gum-stump.*] That's why the popperlations of seven bottoms comes round me in the thirst time of their brains—suckin' like deer at the licks. That's why Gilly Maggot is snuffin' round of me now, in the droughth of his unimagination.

LARK

Gilly Maggot? No-o! Ye don't say ye're doin'

business with him, settin' here now at his back palin'? [BEEM *nods shrewdly.*] Tradin' with Gilly hisself, and hit a man has skun the cream of a bargain offen five ginerations of Maggots!

BEEM

Why fur no? Hit'd be a bad out and if Beem Sprattling couldn't lick the cream-ladle of all the bargains in the ginerations that retch back from now to No-ay.

LARK

Feller alive! You're the champeen!

BEEM

[*Modestly.*]

I shore is.

LARK

Ole Gilly hisself—the ole buck-miser: Well!

[*Squatting near* BEEM, LARK *speaks mysteriously behind his hand.*]

What's the transaction?

[BEEM *shuts his lips hard.*]

Is hit—hogs?

[*A pause.* BEEM *picks his nails.*]

Tax-dodgin'?

[BEEM *rubs his nose. Another pause.*]

Moonshine?

[BEEM *whistles a negative.* LARK *squats nearer, and speaks lower.*]

Beem! Is hit—women?

[BEEM *stares at the sky. From behind the paling a girl's voice begins to sing, with rich clearness.*]

THE GIRL'S VOICE

Wake up, wake up, little Corey!
Go do the best you can:
You can git you a woman
And I can git me a man.

[BEEM *raises a finger.*]

LARK

No-o!—Her? What's the snarl ye're ravellin' of?

BEEM

Hit's a law tangle. In law, these-yere imaginary thoughts must git them the substance of evidence. I's collectin' of hit up—on the side.

LARK

Collectin' evidence?

BEEM

Yis. I'm a collectin' detectivater. But hist of hit now!

[*The girl's voice is heard again.* LARK'S *mouth opens wide, as he listens.*]

THE GIRL'S VOICE

Last time I seed little Corey
She was stan'in' on the banks of the sea,
Drinkin' down her trouble
With a low-down dirty man.

[*Through the gate comes a barefooted buxom Girl about sixteen—ruddy-lipped, her hair loose-coiled. She carried an armful of reddish bark and goes toward the pot on the tripod. As the two men look at her,* LARK *blurts out, low, to* BEEM.]

LARK

Goldy Shoop!—Her hitself? But shore hit's Roosh Maggot is runnin' *her,* not Gilly.

[BEEM *looks knowing, as* GOLDY *goes to the pot on the tripod, drops the bark in it, and busies herself fixing the fire-sticks beneath, still singing.*]

GOLDY

Wake up, wake up, little Corey!
Git on your weddin' clo'es.
I've tuck a notion to marry
For God in heaven knows.

BEEM

[*Approaches her with a gallant flourish.*]

Ha, Miss Goldy! And who is hit for God in heaven ye've tuck a notion' to marry?

[*Catching sight of the Men, she starts up, laughing.*]

GOLDY

'Clare to Cr'ation! And you uns thar?—Mornin', Mr. Sprattling! Howdy, Uncle Lark!

LARK

[*Laughing back at her.*]

Is hit him or me you's aimin' to wake up, for to git on our weddin' clo'es?

GOLDY

Axe that of the cuckoo-bird, Uncle!

[*She sings again.*]

The cuckoo she's a pretty bird; she sings as she flies.
She brings in good tidin's, *and tells us no lies!*

[*With this she sticks her tongue out at* BEEM, *as* LARK *answers her song in a cracked pitch.*]

LARK

She feeds on sweet flowers and makes her voice clear;
She never hollers *cuckoo!* till the Spring o' the year.

Hark thar what I told ye, Beem: Spring o' the year! Hit's this-yer *spring*-trigger fotches the hull gang of us—hen-birds and roosters. Jist let God-a'mighty tetch her off, and pop we hollers "Cookoo!" slick as spittle.—Hain't that a fac', gal?

GOLDY

Step along, Uncle Lark! Hit's shore the runnin' season; but hit tain't the crawin' and scratchin' of ole wedlock fowls the likes of you and Beem Sprattling thar I'm a-dyin' to hear of an A-prile mornin'.

LARK

[*With a large wink at* BEEM.]

Doos that shet our necks tight?—Lord love ye, little woman, will I example to ye the voice of the rooster you *air* dyin' to hear?

GOLDY

And how would *you* know hit?

LARK

[*Flapping his arms and crowing.*]

*Roosh! Roosh! Roosh!*—Hain't hit that-a-way he pipes—the leetle bantam cock-feller?

GOLDY

Roosh Maggot, ye mean? Ha! You're moughty briggetty with your josh-guessin', ain't ye?

[LARK *squeezes* BEEM *by the arm and explodes in a loud haw-hawing.*]

But you're runnin' the back trail, ole Uncle! 'Tain't a sprig-little Maggot named Roosh can be fashin' round *me,* this day and time. No, *Sir!* Hit'll be grand-finer, great-bigger rep than hisn in these-yer hills for Goldy Shoop to be dyin' for!

[LARK *and* BEEM *exchange sudden looks of deep meaning.* GOLDY *notices them and calls, with a light laugh.*]

So, step along, gints! Change partners!

[*As she speaks, an* OLD WOMAN, *leaning on a stick, comes through the gate, and retorts with feeble peevishness.*]

THE OLD WOMAN

Who be you sassin' now, Stuck-uppetty?

GOLDY

[*Bobbing.*]

Gintry from Guessin'-town!

THE OLD WOMAN

Run in! Mag wants ye. She's in a master-hurry. The baby's wakin' up.

GOLDY

[*Looking over her shoulder at the Men, sings as she runs in.*]

Wake up, wake up, Little Corey!

BEEM

Good day, Granny Combs.

GRANNY COMBS

Howdy, howdy!—[*Then with tartness.*] Oh, hit's

jist you, Beem Sprattling. Step up in. The ole man war axin' for ye.

BEEM

To home, is he?

GRANNY

No-o, but soon back. He's to the grist with corn.

BEEM

I'll step up, and tarry him.

[*With a secretive gesture to* LARK, BEEM *goes in. About to follow him,* GRANNY COMBS *peers quizzically toward* LARK.]

LARK

Lost ye your specs, Rhody?

GRANNY

Lark Fiddler! Well, mansakes! Come in. Take a night with us.

[*Moving to greet him, she stumbles, dropping her stick. He catches her from falling, picks the stick up, and helps her to the bench, talking while he does so.*]

LARK

Watch out! Set ye; set a spell. How ye livin' these days?

GRANNY

I'se livin' old and triflin'.

LARK

You're gittin' totterish, ole feller. Hit's a loolie long time agin I seen ye the last while. Downhill, time gits to goin' fast.

GRANNY

Yea, hit's a sight how hit do fasten off. I'se drappin'-ripe for the grave-house, shore. Well, I dreamt o' ye, Lark, come Friday week ago. I dreamt o' ye were settin' ri'chere—and hit Good Friday. And lo, here's Good Friday mornin' hitself, and behold ye now settin' in the valley of the shadder of prophecy.

LARK

[*Catching her mood of despondency.*]

Sorry a thing to dream on a friend o' Friday! Hit forebodes for sin or sorrer. Which a one is overhangin' ye now, Rhody?

GRANNY

Both the two, Lark. Hit 'ud take the unknown tongue of a Holy Roller to elocution hit—the sorrer and the sin here.

LARK

I'm all harped up to listen. Is hit Mag, your gal?

GRANNY

Mag, and Gilly her man, and the measles which

hit passed away all seven the chillun to God's jedgment in one operation of the moon.

LARK

All, ye tell me?

GRANNY

All, let alone the baby, and hit suckin' the tittie.

LARK

[*Commiseratingly.*]

Eh, massy!

GRANNY

And me, their poor ole Gran, for to tuck up the little stiff things in their windin' clo'es, and to watch the men thar upshoulderin' the seven cedar boxes in the blinkin' doorway, and arter then to set yander, daylong in the house-dark, tetchin' and twistin' their play-pretties and their poppet-dolls what were left behint 'em, deef and dumb thar.

LARK

Eh, massy!

GRANNY

Yea, man! But will ye listen now at what's more deefer and dumber nor a doll-poppet in the sinful perishment of his sperrit?

LARK

What, now?

GRANNY

Hit's the begettin' father what fergits his begotten: hit's the uncleavin' man what forsakens the woman that borned 'em on his knees—all seven: hit's the wedlock lover, what goes squanterin' like an ole winterish ram, for to galavant with a young uppitty Jazabel in the spring of her teens, and hit in the face and eyes of the yit-babe-sucklin' wife of him, reaved in her motherhood with the measles!

LARK

No-o!

GRANNY

Yis! Gilly Maggot, my son-by-law. Right evenly in the time o' weepin' he tuck to his sparkin'.

LARK

And him the hog-richest, shut-pocket'dest, hard-shell Baptist in the gaps o' the ridges: Gilly hitself! No-o! You're purely guessin' at hit.

GRANNY

I ain't jist git to guess at hit; I know hit, I tell ye. Itchin' Gilly is for this Goldy Shoop. You seed her thar. When the childers died, he fotched her plumb way from Cow Creek for to do the housin' chores, he says, and holp poor Maggie.—Holp the *Divil,* he were aimin', and hisself to waller sinful with the heifer!

LARK

Eh, then! In this contemptible flesh ole Sattan is high. But Mag, Rhody: your Mag she war never the grand-languaged queen to go footin' hit dumb in the ditch, and her man ridin'. Ye don't tell me she's clumb off her high horse to Gilly?

GRANNY

No, Lor be! She has the reins aholt of him. Mag were borned in the saddle. Gilly has to sly behint her back. But hit's me, many's the time, I's watch his eyes snoopin' in the hair of Goldy Shoop, the likes he were huntin' eggs thar, and her runnin' off cackle-laughin'.

LARK

But what-all is the termination of that-a-way?

GRANNY

Can you keep tight shut?

LARK

I'm a steel trap, Rhody!

GRANNY

Then yere's all they *are* of hit, Lark [*slowly*]: Gilly's aimin' to git shet o' Mag. He's aimin' to git shet of his wife.

LARK

How kin he? She's got him lawful.

GRANNY

He'll sly outen the law. You see, jist.

LARK

But how?

GRANNY

I dunno how—yit. Yander feller in thar, Beem Sprattling—what-fur why is that lie-swearer axin' to see Gilly? And what-fur why war Gilly axin' for him? I'd as ruther see a witch-doctor round the premises as yan Sprattling. Keeps his ole woman starvin' to home on mush and water. Hear him gab, though, ye'd reckon him and her had the Lordamighty to board 'em with milk and honey.

LARK

Never scour him, Rhody! He's perfecturedly brained, Beem is. He has a merited mind about him.

GRANNY

[*Suspiciously.*]

Oh, he has, is he? Well, and how behappened hit *you* come here along of him?

LARK

[*Uneasily.*]

Why, Beem jist he drapped by my cabin, this day mornin', and out I stepped afoolin' thar with Singin' Susie—

GRANNY

With who?

LARK

Singin' Susie she's my fiddle. I war kindly sawin' of her a ditty-tune, when a piece o' rain come sprick-lin', and *kerspang!* she busted—the least string of her, and I were dishearted like. But Beem he says: "Quit ye that," he says, "Put away groan! Come on up creek to the store along of me," he says, "and hunt ye another fiddle-string." So along I canters with 'im, and I were—

GOLDY

[*Coming through the gate, calls.*]

Granny! Mag's wantin' ye. The loom's in session, she says, and will ye holp her with the heddles?

GRANNY

[*Rising.*]

Holp her? And why fur not *you?*

GOLDY

Me! Shore I'se killt a'ready mindin' the baby, and now this-yer madder-bark in the pot. Hain't hit me has to dye the wool for the walkin' wheel, and wind the hanks for the spinnin'?

GRANNY

[*Limping over to the tripod.*]

Yis, yis, consarn ye! [*Peering in.*] Bark in the pot—and no water! Pot on the chain—and no fire!

Hit's that-a-way ye bile the ooze for the dyin'!
Holp me in, Lark. Git me outen the sight of the do-less, lazin' honeysuckle!

LARK

[*Helping* GRANNY *in, peers back with a large wink at* GOLDY, *and sings.*]

She never hollers *Cuckoo!* till the spring o' the year!

GRANNY

Shet your gizzard!

[GOLDY *laughs, and waits a moment till they disappear. Then she goes quickly right, and calls low.*]

GOLDY

Roosh! Roosh!

[*She goes off, but in a moment her voice is heard singing outside, and she returns dance-stepping backward before* ROOSH MAGGOT, *a waggish looking young fellow, seedily clothed, who carries a full pail of water, and eyes* GOLDY *eagerly as she sings at him.*]

Cornstalk fiddle
And a shoe-string bow!
Gals want to go acourtin'
But don't know whar to go.

ROOSH

[*Setting down the pail, capers and sings.*]

I'll go up on the mountain-top
And plant a patch o' cane,
And grind out molasses
For to sweeten Cindy Jane.

Will ye jine me thar?

GOLDY

[*Shaking her head and crossing her fingers.*]

N-n! N-n!

ROOSH

[*Trying to kiss her*]

Buss me, Goldy!

GOLDY

Loosen me off.

ROOSH

Buss me, Goldy!

[*He grabs her again and kisses her.*]

GOLDY

Quit ye! Don't scrooge me so tight. You're a sight awful scroogin' so, whar the hull world kin spy us from the cabin yander.

ROOSH

Who-all—Mag and Granny?—Come ayere, then,

behint the palin'.—What-a-way would ye mind *them* —the old shrew-women?

GOLDY

Granny Combs jist callt me a lazin' honeysuckle.

ROOSH

Lor God, then, I'll grab the word from her! Hain't you seed 'em agrowin', Goldy—them honeysuckle flowers? They sprangles up this-a-way, that-a-way, same hit's your haar.

GOLDY

'Tain't aspranglin'!

[*Behind them, through a broken chink in the paling, the face of* BEEM SPRATTLING *peers forth, and listens furtively.*]

ROOSH

Listen me! I knows a thicket in the hills whar they springs—honeysuckles. I'll take ye thar. Slick, lippy, goldy blooms, they is. Lor me, sech blooms! Yan warm tickle-sweety smell, away-y-y off hit'll coax these-yere hummin' birds, like a fur bell to prayer meetin'. Hrrrrr they come!—Least, purtiest, rainbowest bird in the world hit's a hummin'-bird-rooster. All stir he is. And thar he'll plumb hover hisself on the aidge of a bloom, alippin' hit thar with his bill, pickin' and suckin the honeybeer—same's me now on the aidge o' your mouth, Goldy Honeysuckle.

GOLDY

[*Returns his kisses, laughing.*]

Mansakes! Ain't you anticky, Roosh, with your honeysuckle sarmons. Bell to prayer meetin'! You's shore mindin' me of the ole man.

ROOSH

[*Changing abruptly.*]

Quit ye thar! Not *him*—Uncle Gilly?

GOLDY

Why fur no? Your ole uncle he's master prayerful when he meets up with me, and the palin' to hide us.

[*As* GOLDY'S *face tilts up toward the paling,* BEEM'S *head is drawn back quickly, and disappears.*]

ROOSH

[*Dourly.*]

Goldy Shoop! Don't shackle me to pieces! Is hit *me* you'se aimin' to set up with, or is hit him?

GOLDY

Roosh Maggot! Is hit sich a certain spicketty, clever-clean boy, which I couldn't yit coax him a beard with a lather of kisses—is hit him I'm asettin' with here? Or is hit sich a certain spavinny mule of an ole fearsome man, with the mange on his cheekbone, and the long chin-hairs of him dribblin' with baccy beer, like old straw which hit is when ye

kick over a stone in the cowyard, and the mouldy leetle bess-bugs goes scuttin' off down in the dung of hit? Tell me now!

ROOSH

[*Grinning.*]

Poor ole Gilly! You shore do give him out to favor his livin' pictur! [*Suspicious again.*] All the same, he's huly-durn rich, Uncle Gill is. He's got half his neebors sewed up tight in mortgages; and hit's a sight awful the gang o' hogs he owns runnin' the timber. [*Deep-earnestly.*]—He maht buy ye, Goldy!

GOLDY

Oh, maht he! So you reckon I's boughten gear, do ye?

ROOSH

I don't reckon no ill-friendship, but I'll jist plump ye the question this-a-way: Gin ary a gal can git her a millionaire—hain't a gal a gal?

GOLDY

Then I'll jist plump ye another, Roosh.—How many pints o' buttermilk can ye churn from an ole butternut?

ROOSH

[*Laughing.*]

Haw! As many, I guess, as ye can milch pennies from old Uncle. [*Sobering.*] But I'll give ye re-

member one fact truth that retches deep down in the ole man's money-poke.

GOLDY

And what is hit?

ROOSH

Ole Uncle and me we's near kinned. I'm his own borned niece on the Maggoty side of the gineration. One day another I'll be heirin' him at law.

GOLDY

You *will* not. Hit's Mag's baby in yander that'll be heirin' him.

ROOSH

[*Somewhat crestfallen and vexed.*]

Yis; the baby. That's my one-only stumble on the lawful trail to fortune.

GOLDY

Ye'd better believe! Hit's pig-healthy with sleep and fat as a young shoat—yan baby. The measles never scamped hit.

ROOSH

Mebbe not; but they's more roads to salvation nor the measles, Goldy. I set up nights sayin' 'em over by heart and over. To wit, they's mumps; they's cholery morbus; they's pox—the small and

the chicken; they's itch, and they's worms—hook and tape; they's scarlet-red rash, and they's all the runnin' sores of Job and his Huly-Bible afflictions—

GOLDY

[*Rising suddenly.*]

Shh! Quit up, Roosh!—Look ayander. Git ye the pail, quick!

[*Running to the tripod, she beckons* ROOSH, *who fetches the full pail hastily.*]

Turn her in the pot.

[*Roosh is in the process of pouring the water from the pail into the fire-pot, when there comes scuffling in, right, an oldish, unkempt* FIGURE, *stooping under a small, rounded sack slung over his shoulder.*

*Seeing the two young people, he stops abruptly, eyeing them with uneasy suspicion. As they busy themselves at the pot, pretending not to see him, he tiptoes back a little and secretes the sack in a hollow gum-stump.*

*Then he comes forward, more at ease, and speaks in a soft, whiney drawl.*]

THE OLD MAN

Roosh.

ROOSH

[*Turning about, with* GOLDY.]

Mornin', Uncle Gilly.

GOLDY

Howdy, Sir.

GILLY

Who-all's in?

ROOSH

Dunno, Sir. I were to the spring for water.

GOLDY

Beem Sprattling—he's come.

ROOSH

Has!

[*Gilly picks his fingers, a habit he continues at intervals.*]

GOLDY

He were axin' fer you.

GILLY

Were?

[*Silence of several seconds before Gilly squints up again.*]

Roosh.

ROOSH

Yis, Uncle.

GILLY

Tell Beem kin he wait me yander.

ROOSH

[*Going.*]

Yis, Sir.

GILLY

Hold yit.

ROOSH

[*Stops.*]

I's aholtin', Sir.

GILLY

Jist Beem.—No needs to let on to the ole woman.

ROOSH

[*With a grin, going.*]

Nowise!

GILLY

Oh,—Roosh!

GILLY

[*Stops.*]

Sir?

GILLY

Take your time.

ROOSH

All what God creationed, Sir. And behold! The mornin' and the evenin' war the fust day!

[ROOSH *goes in the gate.* GILLY'S *mien and manner cautiously change to the sentimental.*]

GILLY

Goldy.

GOLDY

[*Smirking.*]

Ole Gilly dear!

GILLY

The gate—hit's on the jar.

GOLDY

[*Nonchalant.*]

Is hit?

GILLY

Shove it to.

GOLDY

What fur?

GILLY

You're sightly thar. The ole woman—Step this-a-way. The palin' is higher.

GOLDY

Lor be—the palin' agin!

GILLY

Set ye.

[*They sit on the trencher,* GOLDY *keeping somewhat removed from* GILLY, *who gradually edges up to her.*]

Goldy, hit's a sight Godawful how pretty you be asettin' thar.

GOLDY

Hit's the likes God hisself made me.

GILLY

That's pintblank what *I* says. Ye're a Godly critter, and I'se a Godly seven-days Christ'an. Like and like belongs to git togither. Hit's natur, and hit's Huly Bible. Hain't that reasonish?

GOLDY

Hit's seasonish, Gilly.

GILLY

Well,—will ye hitch?

GOLDY

I shore will.

GILLY

[*Excited.*]

Goldy, ye will! Ye'll take up with me?

GOLDY

I shore will, if hit's take up the Huly Bible along of ye.

GILLY

Hn! What-a-way you mean, jist?

GOLDY

Jist God and wedlock, Gilly.

GILLY

But thar's Mag. *She's* got me hitched that-a-way.

[*Behind them, from above the paling,* BEEM'S *head peeks over, listening.*]

GOLDY

Shore! Thar's Mag and the baby.

GILLY

And they's got the law on me.

GOLDY

Shorenough! They 's got the law on ye.

GILLY

*Man-human* law. That ain't Ginesis. Ginesis says when ole Abram—

GOLDY

Shet your mouth on ole Abram. He shet hisn away back.

GILLY

Goldy! Don't uncomfort me. Ye've got me plumb shackled to pieces.

GOLDY

[*Giggling.*]

Eehee! Yan's the tune *he* were singin'—poor Rooshy!

GOLDY

Who? Is hit him, my niece—

GOLDY

Poor Rooshy boy!

GOLDY

[*With sudden craftiness.*]

Hark ahere, gal. Jist whetstone the wits o' ye and answer up. Is hit Roosh ye're aimin' to swing to, or me hitself?

GILLY

Listen him—the ole Gilly dear! Is hit a man, now—sich a certain young-springin'-up ole man, with the beautiest solid face in the beard of him, and hit the proud-richest, masterest wonder-for-hogs in the world: is hit him I's dyin' to git shet of his wife of and swing to? Or mebbe is hit—listen at me!—Is hit yander leetle run-rabbit of a feller, with the sproutin'-tater eyes of him, which he popples 'em out in a crack o' the palin', and his hindfoot scratchin' his lop ear for a nibbleful of louses, agin he mahtn't be good-able to rob him a raddish from the supper-pot?—Which-a-one o' them two is hit now?

GILLY

Eh, Goldy, Goldy! You've mere witched me. My hands is trimblish to tip to ye.

[*As* GILLY *half rises,* BEEM'S *head disappears from above the paling.*]

GOLDY

Never tip to me empty-handed, Gilly. I ain't bargainless.

GILLY

[*Rising with a look of pained decision.*]

Nor me, nuther. I'll fair bargain ye. I brung hit along of me.

[*Curious.*]

Brung what-all?

GILLY

[*Goes to the bee-gum and pulls out the secreted sack.*]

I war foremindful of ye, Goldy. I brung hit in the meal poke.

[*He sits down again beside her, with the sack on the ground between them, and begins to untie the top.*]

GOLDY

[*With growing excitement.*]

For me? Lor' massy! Ef hit tain't wigglin'!

GILLY

I hope to tell ye hit's wigglin'! Hit were borned wigglin'.

[*Having untied the string,* GILLY *holds the top shut with his hand.* GOLDY *tries to pull it open.*]

GOLDY

O Lor' be! Loost her quick, Gilly! Open her!

GILLY

No-o! She opens when we closes—this-yere bargain. Come—What's mine when she's yourn?

GOLDY

The two arms of me arounct your neck, ole Gilly dear!

GILLY

Signed and sealt! Peek into her.

[*Drawing down the top of the sack,* GILLY *uncovers a small, dirty-pink object, tied round with a red bandana. Feeling of it, Goldy gives a short scream, drawing back her hand.*]

GOLDY

Massiful!—Hit's got a piggy snout.

GILLY

Shore. Hit's a young shoat. Twenty-two pound, three ounces, jist, on the balancers.

GOLDY

Land! And I tuck hit for a baby. What fur did ye swaddle hits head that-a-way?

GILLY

[*Tying the sack again.*]

That's to hush hit squallin'. I roped hits legs, too—the piggy. Ye can hide hit so from the ole

woman, agin ye can snuggle hit to the green timber for roastin'. Fat-drippy hit'll be in your mouth.

GOLDY

And hit's mine?

GILLY

I hope to tell ye. And now—what-all's mine?

GOLDY

[*Throwing her arms round his neck.*]

O the dad-blessed ole Gilly dear!

GILLY

Eh, Goldy! The livin' sweetmeaty body of ye! —Hit's a clos't bargain now?

GOLDY

[*Drawing quickly away, with a laugh.*]

Shore! Hit's done clos't up tight with these-yer two arms. Hit's paid over, Gilly.

GILLY

Paid over! But the shoat—

GOLDY

[*Grabbing the sack.*]

Mine hit is, God ward ye. The balance of me is huly wedlock.

GILLY

[*Aghast.*]

Wedlock! But Mag, the old wife of me—

GOLDY

Ef you wants me, Gilly, you'll jist have to git shet of her.

[Swash! *at these words, a shower of milky liquid dashes over* GILLY'S *head and shoulders from above him, where* MAG MAGGOT *looms from behind the paling top, spilling the contents of a piggin bucket.*]

MAG

[*Screaming, as she spills it.*]

Git shet of her! Git shet of her! Git shet of her!

GOLDY

[*In shrill laughter.*]

Ooh! Hahaha! She's clumb up and doused ye with the churn slop. O Lordy, behold! Mag's aimin' the piggin at ye. Duck your head, ole husband!

MAG

[*Hurling the piggin, screams higher.*]

Shet of your wife, Gilly!

[*The piggin crashes, and Mag disappears behind the paling.*]

GOLDY

[*Doubling over, convulsed.*]

O Lordy God! Lordy God!

GILLY

[*Spluttering and dripping.*]

Pah! Fo! Divil of a hell-bornder!—eedrappin'!—Fah!

GOLDY

O Lor, Gilly! She's pap-raisin' ye on buttermilk. I's dyin' out in the ribs.

ROOSH

[*Appears in the gateway, broad-grinning*]

Scoot! She's acomin'.

GOLDY

[*Reaching the sack to him.*]

Quick, then!—Take the poke, Rooshy, and hide me hit.

ROOSH

What's in her?

GOLDY

A live shoat. I'll bescribe ye later. Run now!

[ROOSH *runs in with the sack, passing* MAG *just as she appears there—a drudgy, drawn-faced woman, with colorless hair pulled back tight to a small pug. She carries herself, however, with*

*a wiry power, and holds her nursing baby fiercely to her right breast, half hid in a shawl, as she comes with swift strides toward* GILLY. *Meantime* GOLDY *draws away right and watches them.*]

GILLY

Dadburn her—the ole she-woman!

MAG

Yis—yis—yis—yis! Dadburn her, the ole she-woman! Dadburn her, which is dadburnt in her bosom with a home-distructin' ole he-devil of a no-man, and hit ram-crazy in the loins of him for a young leetle shake-tail she-wether jump-over-the-bars! Dadburn *her* the wool off, and both the two of ye to creen naked in the wind of your shame!

GILLY

Hold ye, woman! I's heern ye before. Ye're not untongueless.

MAG

No, Massy be thankful to! *He* slitted me in the tongue, the Same in Jordan Who give the mipkin-mockinbird her voice in the notary hills: the Same Who He builded Him His Babel-tower in the middist of the dumb Biblish heathen and *breakers of wedlock!*

GILLY

Hold agin, Maggie. Gin ye start off quotin' the Scriptur, let that I larn ye the true textes. I'll give

ye back Ginesis, now; chapter the sixteen:—"Now Sary, Abram's wife, bare him no childun"—

MAG

Hit's a lie-swearin'. Seven hit is I done bear ye from this-yer body, and the eighth which hit is here suckin'.

GILLY

"*Sary! Sary,*" hit says! Listen me, Mag. Hit's a parable.

MAG

[*Scornfully.*]

Hit's a crawlin'-out!

GILLY

"And Sary she had a handmaid what her name was Hagar"——

MAG

[*Glancing at* GOLDY.]

Hagar *Shoop,* is hit?

GOLDY

[*Tittering.*]

Teehee, ole Gilly!

GILLY

"And Sary says unto Abram, 'Behold now,' she says, 'I pray thee go in to my maid: hit may be that I may obtain childun by her.'

MAG

[*Eyeing him fiercely.*]

Ho, then! Ye'd better try hit—jist!

GILLY

"And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sary"—

MAG

[*Gasping for utterance.*]

Ha!—Ah!

GILLY

"And Sary, Abram's wife, tuck Hagar her maid and give her to her hosband Abram to be his wife."

GOLDY

Teehee! O Lor'!

GILLY

"And Abram he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived—"

MAG

So! Ha!

[*Seizing up the piggin from the ground, she turns upon* GILLY.]

And so will ye mock of me in the bereavement of my dead conceivin'?

GILLY

Put hit down, Mag,—the piggin! Hit's no sich

a mockery—the Huly Bible. Hit's the book o' Ginesis, chapter the sixteen, verse the—

MAG

[*Lifting the piggin aloft.*]

Bang the book in your jaw!

[GILLY *succumbs in pantomime, as* ROOSH *reenters, followed by* BEEM *and* LARK, *at the gate.*]

GOLDY

[*Tauntingly.*]

"And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sary!"—Teehee!

MAG

[*Glaring on her.*]

Teehee, will ye? Pipe up agin, the likes of a toad-frog in a green puddle? [*Dashing at her.*] Jist let that I wade in, and scrooge the music from your wind-whistle.

[*She chases* GOLDY, *who eludes her in laughter and runs in the gate.* MAG *stops there, panting, and caresses the baby in the shawl.*]

Ah, the babe-flower! The poor leetle lonesome low, and hit joggled to death! Retch here, Roosh, and hold hit! Set down and hug hit still, agin the ragin' blood o' me mote pizen-strangle hit.

[*She hands the baby to Roosh, who sits on the ground, holding it in dumb embarrassment, as Mag turns again on Gilly.*]

Step forth now, people! Behold ye hits Paw in his glory, brashin' o' Ginesis. Ginesis—and him murderin' his own begotten gineration in hit's mother's milk. Ginesis!—and him hidin' behint ole Abram and Sary and Hagar, to git shet of his wife. Hold, then, Gilly Maggot! I'll give ye the Bible back on ye. I'll give ye remember what behappened yan hussy Hagar, which the Lord driv her from the face of ole Sary and scratched her a livin' in the wilderness.—Speak up, Beem Sprattling!—and thankin' ye for showin' me whar to aim the buttermilk.

GILLY

[*Astonished.*]

The buttermilk!

MAG

Have I give my ole man the Gospel, or hain't I?

BEEM

Friend lady, I scringe to answer of ye. Fur-off be it from my tongue for to wedge-drive the Gospel betwixt a she-male and the two livin' males of her.

MAG

[*Pointing to* GILLY.]

What's that? Two males! Hit's *one* man-male and two women of him that I's givin' ye.

BEEM

[*Pointing at* MAG.]

And hit's a one woman-female I'se givin' ye back —and her astraddlin' the triangle.

GILLY

And who's he gabbin' about?

BEEM

[*Gazing at Mag.*]

Hit's young Maggie Combs I's remembrancin'— long ago yander in the gyarden-patch: proud, virgin Maggie in the shower-dazzle-bloom of her days, how hit is when the grand storm-lightnin' rairs up sudden in a squall—and her black hair cracklin', and the eyes of her rainin' down hail-balls of distructin' glory, and me leapin' over the gyarden-fence in the trimbles of love.

MAG

[*Staring.*]

Love-trimbles! What *is* the feller? Is hit like so ye git short-minded in the head, settin' so many years of your time in the jailhouse?

LARK

Don't disjedge him, woman! He's a sharp. He's aimin' to mean somethin'.

GILLY

[*In dumbfounded suspicion.*]

What's yan talk, Beem Sprattling? Is hit that-a-way you's come here to trade business with me, this day mornin'?

BEEM

Lor, Mr. Maggot, I ain't nowise aimin' to disfurnish *you,* by any fairety. Only jist Maggie, thar, the proud sight of her, hit's stung me so, till I jist outed the long, darksome secrets of time.

MAG

Secrets! Betwixt who? You hitself—and me?

BEEM

Yis, Mag. Jist you and me, trystin' in the gyarden-patch—and only Godamighty let-in for a peek on us. Will ye forswear of hit?

MAG

Which! Will I *lie*-swear of hit! You walkin' gallers-corpse, and your neck yit crackin'! [*Appealing to the others.*] Will ye listen him?

[*The Men stare at one another, flabberghasted. At their silence, she bursts forth in rage.*]

Nay, then, dadburn the hell-fire gang of ye all! Ha, Massiful! Me, which has borned seven in the screamin' of the birth-stool, and them now all airth-shovelled-under with the measles! And you, men of ye, you to stand here in their leetle seven grave-

beds, funnin' me with lies in the face of my death-weepin'! Oh, consarn ye in Satan! Git you riddance!—But me, I'll be to go in now, and snub out yonders the sorry heart in my mouth, and hit tear-salty from my leakin' nose. Roosh! Fotch after me the baby. I'm dyin' away.

[*In sobs of snuffling vexation,* MAG *hurries off through the gate.* ROOSH *rises to his feet with the baby. On either side* LARK *and* GILLY *assail* BEEM.]

LARK

[*Remonstrating.*]

Shore, Beem, the ole woman—

GILLY

[*With heated suspicion.*]

Secrets, is they?—betwixt ye?

LARK

She's fusted. Hit ain't meritable—

GILLY

Secrets with Mag? So ye outed with 'em, did ye! What divil business is hit ye're drivin'?

BEEM

[*With cool self-gratulation.*]

Hit's evidence.

GILLY

Evidence!

LARK

[*Assuming a wise look.*]

Oh? Evidence!

GILLY

What-a-way?

BEEM

Hit's witnesses.

GILLY

Witnesses! Which?

BEEM

You's one, and Lark's two, and Roosh's three. I's got her witnessed and evidenced. I's got the case plumb detectivated.

LARK

[*Looking wiser.*]

Ha,—detectivated!

BEEM

[*To* GILLY.]

I's got the law by the tail—and *you* awaggin' of hit.

GILLY

Hit?—Me! What *are* hit ye've got?

BEEM

Well, siree, hit's what the supreme jedges calls a case in oncommon law. Plain out—hit's one way to git shet of a wife.

GILLY

[*Dropping his voice.*]

Hist ye! Ye needn't holler hit. Step this-a-way. —Lark, git to go in to the ole woman. She's uncomforted. She'll stand sperritin' up.

LARK

Yea, man! I'll jist step up in and give her the Bible.

GILLY

Hold ye! Let alone Ginesis. Give her Revelation.

LARK

Yea, man! I'll give her Gog and Magog. I'll give her death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them.—Poor ole Maggie!

[LARK *goes in.* GILLY *draws* BEEM *aside, whispering. In deep rumination,* ROOSH *stands rocking the baby in his arms, and sings to it dolefully.*]

ROOSH

O sister, O sister, come go with me,
Go with me down to the sea.
Jury flower gent the rose-berry,
The jury hangs over the rose-berry.

Yis, rose-berry babe! Hit's God's jury of angels is overhangin' ye—and me what's singin ye *Rock-edeby.* And hit's shore God Hisself what made ye fat-sleepy as a milk-fed shoat, and your uncle-cousin Roosh to possession ye in his arms, at this self hour.

[*He sings on with the dolorous tune.*]

She picked her up all in her strong arms
And threwed her sister into the sea.
Jury flower gent the rose-berry,
The jury hangs over the rose-berry.

GILLY

[*Speaking low to* BEEM.]

Then ye know the hull story, ye tell me?

BEEM

Git shet of your wife, and wedlock Goldy: Hain't that hit?

[*They talk on, very low.*]

ROOSH

[*Pricking his ears toward them, croons on to the baby.*]

O sister, O sister, give me your glove,
And you may have your own true love.
Jury flower gent the rose-berry—

BEEM

Will ye hear the solvation of hit?

GILLY

I'll hope to die to hear hit!

BEEM

Then listen me. The solvation—is deefamation.

[*They whisper on.*]

ROOSH

[*Drawing nearer to them, crooning.*]

O, the farmer's wife was settin' on a rock,
Tyin' and asewin' of a black silk knot.
Jury flower gent the rose-berry,
The jury—

GILLY

[*To* BEEM.]

No-o! So ye'll defame my wife that ye've knowed her in secret—and her you?

BEEM

Now you's got hit—my imagical thought.

GILLY

Afore I sparked her?

BEEM

Yis, and ever sence—all the days of your wedlock, off and on.

GILLY

And hit onlawful?

BEEM

Shore! That gits ye the law on *your* side. Hit's Bible adultery.

GILLY

Janey Crackindiddle!

BEEM

That gits ye clean shet of her, don't hit? And then—Goldy.

ROOSH

[*Starting visibly, resumes his crooning in haste.*]

Hit's no fish and hit's no swan,
For the water's drownded a gay lady.
Jury flower gent the rose-berry,
The jury hangs over—

GILLY

[*Rubbing his palms together.*]

Hit's plumb masterish! And ye'll norate hit public?

BEEM

Would I bury hit in the cimetery? No, *sirr!* Hit's a Deefamation that'll retch up and stound the cherubims on their thrones. Hit's a Deefamation will shackle down the mighty from their livin' seats, and uply rair the dead to blow a song of hit in the goldin horn of Jedgment. And the deefamin' Gabriel shall tromp hit onmortally with the mouth of Beem Sprattling.

GILLY

Hist ye! Yander's Roosh. He's list'nin at usns.

BEEM

Let that he listen. He's a witness for the accusement.

ROOSH

[*Feigning inattention, snuggles the baby.*]

The farmer run with his great hook
And hooked this fair lady outen the sea.
Jury flower gent the rose—

GILLY

[*Approaching, with* BEEM.]

Leave your loolyin'. How much have ye heern?

ROOSH

Overly much.

GILLY

[*After consulting* BEEM *by a glance.*]

How much are ye aimin' to holp us?

ROOSH

[*Humorously shrewd.*]

Jist ary as much as I's kinned to ye, Uncle Gilly.

GILLY

How so that?

ROOSH

How much is your borned niece kinned to ye, Uncle Gilly?

GILLY

Closish nigh.

ROOSH

But, Uncle Gilly: gin s'posin' this-yer lonesome babe had been tuck by the measles, how much nigherer kin would I ben to ye now?

GILLY

The likes of a son, I reckon, niece.

ROOSH

And, Beem Sprattling: is hit the likes of a son-niece that can heir his uncle-father by the law?

BEEM

Yis, shorely. Ef he's the nigherest male by kin, hit's the law.

GILLY

Hold, yit! Ef the ole man keered to, he maht fergit him in his will.

BEEM

He maht; yis.

GILLY

Listen me, Roosh. How much wuth is Goldy to ye?

ROOSH

[*Shrugging.*]

Goldy? Haw! Not the black o' my nail—not *that* wuth!

[*He snaps his nail.*]

GILLY

No?—Then listen me, Roosh. Ef God spares hit, the baby, hit'll nacherly heir me at law; ef God don't spare hit, *you'll* heir me. But meantimes I ain't a uncle to fergit my borned niece—nohow.

ROOSH

Thanks, Uncle.

GILLY

And over yander in the corn-barn, Rooshy, they's a chist of new meal. [*Handing him an empty sack.*] Take this along of ye, and sack ye up a bushel. Holp yerself; hit's yourn.

ROOSH

Thank ye kindsome, Uncle.

GILLY

[*Knowingly.*]

And, Rooshy, fotch here back yan ither leetle sack what Goldy give ye to safe-keep.

ROOSH

[*Slightly embarrassed, going.*]

Yis, Uncle; shore.

GILLY

And, Rooshy, when hit comes for this-yer dee-famation, Beem will needs a witness.

ROOSH

Shore, Uncle. Let him to call the jury, and jist count on your own borned niece!

[*Rocking the baby,* ROOSH *goes toward the gate.*]

By-low, lonesome. Ef God *shouldn't* spare ye—

[*He sings to the dolesome tune, as he goes in.*]

O, what will we do with her fingers so small?
We'll take them and we'll make harp screws.
Jury flower gent the rose-berry,
The jury hangs over the rose-berry—

[*As* ROOSH'S *voice dies away,* GILLY *leads* BEEM *by a gesture to the bench.*]

GILLY

[*Sitting.*]

Set easeful, Beem.

[BEEM *sits. There is a perceptible pause of silence, during which each follows his own thoughts, with an occasional glance at the other—prepar-*

*atory to tackling the tense business both have in mind. Finally,* GILLY *speaks again.*]

Hit's stillsome, hain't hit?

BEEM

Somehow rather.

GILLY

By noontide hit'll git to git stillsomer.

[BEEM *nods. A pause.*]

Hark, yander: Were that a sweet-tater-bird?

BEEM

N-n! Hit's a Larry-whistle.

[*A pause.*]

GILLY

Deefamation: hit's a God-gift!

BEEM

The giftes of God ain't foreby yit. I handles 'em —for kerlatral.

GILLY

Fair trade hain't no robbery.—What's the kerlatral?

BEEM

The forfeits of oninvention is manyfold.

GILLY

Sich like what-all?

BEEM

Sich like—turkeys, goose-feathers, mule-harness, gyarden-stuff, lamb's wool, spin'les, cardin'-combs, corn-whisky——

GILLY

Hold! Sich-all is God-forbidden! Hit's ontimely. Ye're fergittin' what time hit is.

BEEM

A-prile, shore hit is.

GILLY

Yis; and Good Friday hit is and the Lord still shet in his grave-tomb.

BEEM

But they's fat turkeys fit to wring their necks roostin' yander in your gumtree. They'd melt in my mouth.

GILLY

They'd rot in your mouth, stinkin', this day and time. A green fly wouldn't tetch 'em, traded on Good Friday.

BEEM

[*Visibly depressed.*]

I plumb forgot hit—Good Friday. Yea, then—what must we?

GILLY

Yea, then—must we find us a fair trade that's

God-'llowable. [*Suddenly slapping his knee.*] I have hit!

BEEM

[*Hopefully.*]

Where have ye hit?

GILLY

Roosh he's fetchin' hit: a pricely wonder!

BEEM

Is hit pricely enough to bargain the wonder of a deefamation, and hit languaged by me?

GILLY

Lawk, man: hit would outbargain a denouncement of Israel, and hit languaged by Isaiah!

BEEM

[*His spirits rising.*]

Shorely?—And what is hit?

GILLY

[*Definitively.*]

Hit's a shoat.

BEEM

[*Crestfallen.*]

A shoat! [*Then with rising tone of injury.*] Mr. Maggot, is hit a shoat which hit is a fair trade for the imaginary giftes of God's sperrit?

GILLY

Hit is. Hit's high-sperritted hitself.

BEEM

Sperritted? The weanlin' of a sow—sperritted?

GILLY

Like a ghost walkin'. Hit's no common pig. Hit's purely white all-overish, like snow new driftet: nary a bobble of black from tailpiece to nosepug. And hits leetle eyes rose-pinkish, what the tear-water of hit, ef ye wash in your own eye, ye can see the wind whistle.

BEEM

[*Starting, with new interest.*]

*See* hit—the wind? And hit oninvisible?

GILLY

The wind hitself—jist mere nothin', and hit sightly—movin' like smoke. And in hit we'ns live and move and has our bein'. Is that Bible-sperritted enough for ye—a shoat that'll show ye the wind?

BEEM

[*Intently.*]

Jist ye wash hits tears in your eye?

GILLY

One drap will do hit. But that's only the start-off. For ye can take the dream-bone of hit, and

stick hit under your bed-piller, and standin' right thar ye'll behold all will behappen ye from the womb to the windin'-sheet.

BEEM

[*Eagerly.*]

Hits dream-bone? Hits dream-bone, ye said?

GILLY

That's hits floatin'-rib. And ef ye raise the critter to hog-bigness, jist take ye some pincers and pull hits wisdom-tooth, and pack hit in the back-poke o' your pants, and ye'll never see onluck whilst ye set on hit.

BEEM

[*Excited.*]

Is hit fur-off—this-yer shoat?

GILLY

No-o! Hit's sacked up and ripe-ready for ye. Here hit's acomin' now!

BEEM

[*Starting up, as Roosh enters with a bulging sack.*]

I'll jest take hit.

ROOSH

Yere she is, Uncle.

GILLY

Sot her down, Roosh.

ROOSH

'Tain't hefty. I'll holt her.

BEEM

[*Staring closely.*]

I's lean-hongry for a look-in.

GILLY

Ope her up. We's tradin'.

ROOSH

[*Fingering the tie-strings with embarrassment.*]

Hit's a terrible power I had tightin' hit.

GILLY

Slack her loose, then.

ROOSH

[*Sitting on a gum-stump, holds the sack, somewhat anxiously, on his knees.*]

Hit's a terriblest tangle how I twisted the knot.

BEEM

[*Unclasping a big jack-knife.*]

This-yere blade cuts sharp. Let that I slit hit.

ROOSH

[*Shrilly.*]

Goda'massy, no! Will ye spill murder on my hands?

BEEM

Jist cuttin' a cord?

ROOSH

Hit maht be the juglar cord! Ye maht make a mislick and drownd the sucklin' in red blood of hitself.

GILLY

Come. Onkiver the snout of hit.

ROOSH

[*Slowly opens the mouth of the sack, as* BEEM *peers with close eagerness.*]

Peek, now.

BEEM

[*Starting back.*]

Hit's red bloody a'riddy!

GILLY

Nay; yan's my red neckhankychee, jist. I swaddled the head of hit—to be stillsome. Watch now, Rooshy! Yere comes Lark. Sack hit tight agin.

LARK

[*Entering from the gate, comes toward them with troubled looks.*]

The ole woman is oncomfortless. She's deef to Revelation. She's witherin' in the dark o' the moon.

GILLY

Ye're jist in the nick to be officious, Lark.

LARK

[*Brightening.*]

What-all is the ciremony?

GILLY

Hit's the oath-bindin' of a bargain betwixt me and Beem, thar. And we's jintly appinted you for to be trustee of the kerlatral.

BEEM

[*Bewildered.*]

Jintly?

GILLY

Roosh, hand Lark the kerlatral.

LARK

[*Taking the sack, which* ROOSH *hands him carefully.*]

What wonder is in hit?

GILLY

A pricely wonder, to be kept under bond of your sweared secretdom, and nowise never to be delivered up by you, *ef* and *ontil*—hark that, Beem!—*ef* and *ontil* the same Sprattling shall deliver, public, the onmentionable Deefamation.

LARK

Deefamation?

BEEM

[*Nodding.*]

Ye'll hear me norate hit in the face and eyes of Jehovy.

GILLY

Yea, man! Ye're holdin' in your arms the ark of the covenant of the Deefamation hitself. Stick up your right! Will ye swear now nowise, as bescribed —up pain of God's calamity—never to give hit revelation?

LARK

[*Raising his right hand.*]

Yes, Sirr! I'm done with Revelation. I swear of hit.

GILLY

Speak up, Rooshy. Are ye swear-binded now for witness—and henceforward, next called on?

ROOSH

Yis, Uncle.

GILLY

Finaciously, Beem, you and me: Is us ourselves jintly swore to give and take, and keep secret, accordin' to bargain aforesaid—up pain of God's calamity smitin' the offender? Is hit *Yea,* or *Nay?*

[*Together, raising their hands.*]

Yea!

LARK

[*Indicating the sack.*]

This-yere ark, Gilly: whar will I store hit?

GILLY

[*To* LARK.]

Pack hit home now, afore the ole woman gits wind of hit. Keep hit, till Beem claims hit rightful.

LARK

[*Starting to leave with the sack.*]

Hit's a wonder how a human covenant is so leetle and round and warm!

[ROOSH *follows him, a bit anxiously.*]

GILLY

Hist! Beem Sprattling! [*Speaking lower, at* BEEM'S *ear.*] Hit'll likely git hongry—the shoat. Afore hit mought *starve* on the trustee, wouldn't ye better begin your job?

BEEM

Rest your sperrit, Mr. Maggot. This-yer night, in the creeks of seven mountains, ten million of toad-frogs will be pipin' in the dark of day-set: and ary leetle frog will be publishin' the shame that'll git ye clean shet of your wife. [*Calling.*] Lark! Wait up, now! Go along of me as fur as my cabin.

[BEEM *starts to go, passing* ROOSH, *who hovers about nervously.*]

GILLY

Hold, yit! About Maggie—what's the law, Beem? Ef we jail her, kin they git to bail her?

BEEM

No-o. Not if nobody don't axe for a *habeas corpse.*

ROOSH

[*Half overhearing, aghast.*]

Axe for a *baby's corpse!* For the love of God, what's yan words ye're sayin'?

BEEM

*Habeas corpse.* Hit's law language. Hit's beyand ye.

ROOSH

[*In perturbation, calls after* LARK, *who is just disappearing with the sack.*]

Lark Fiddler,—hey! When ye're crossin' the creek, mind ye don't drap hit in the ford.

BEEM

Pish, boy; a shoat will stand duckin'.

[*He goes out, after* LARK, *right.*]

GILLY

[*Left, at the gate.*]

Come in, Roosh. I's more to tell ye.

[GILLY *goes in.* ROOSH *follows a few steps, but*

*pauses in anxious perplexity. Staring where* LARK *and* BEEM *have disappeared, he mutters aloud:*]

ROOSH

Jury flower gent the rose-berry,
The jury hangs over the rose-berry—

[*After a moment,* GOLDY *steps through the gate, dragging out a sack. Untying it, she calls low to* ROOSH.]

GOLDY

Rooshy! I spied whar ye hid hit.

ROOSH

[*Turning hastily toward her.*]

Goldy. Answer me quick. Ef I war Uncle Gilly's heir by law, how soon would ye marry me?

GOLDY

[*Throwing him a kiss.*]

This day mornin'!

[*Turning down the sack's mouth, she uncovers the pink head of a shoat, the snout tied round with a string.*]

Lor me! Hit's tied with a cord. What's behapped the red neckhankycheef?

[*Glancing up at* ROOSH, *who stands muttering to himself.*]

What's that you're rumblin'?

ROOSH

Nothin'. Jist law language.

GOLDY

Come here'n! Kiss me.—What-fur why are ye hesitatin'?

ROOSH

I war hesitatin' in my thoughts: jist wonderin'—

GOLDY

Wonderin' what-all?

ROOSH

About the trustee:—ef he happed now to drap hit in the creek; and ef he ontied the top, and peeked in of hit, and—stid of a live shoat—hit were—a baby's corpse!

THE VOICE OF MAG

[*Calls shrilly from within.*]

Rooshy!

[ROOSH *starts back, quailing.*]

GOLDY

[*Jumping up with the sack, hands it to* ROOSH.]

Here! Pack hit! Mag's comin'!

[*They rush off, right, carrying the sack together.*]

MAG

[*Comes through the gate, calling.*]

Rooshy! — Roosh! — Whar's the baby?

[*Curtain.*]

# ACT SECOND

"When the moon gits a-runnin' with a gang o' them warm stars, hit's bound to het up the airth,—evenly in A-prile."

## ACT II.

*Inside the paling of* BEEM SPRATTLING'S *cabin-yard.*
*At left, a gate—with an old shoe for a hinge—opening inward between two lily-bushes in bloom.*
*At right, the wide end of a low porch, with log pillars and step leading to door into the cabin.*
*At back, a dilapidated corn-crib, on high ricketty underpinnings.*
*From outside, left, comes a confused murmur of voices; the gate half opens; two or three mountaineers peer in, and then hurry along. A Woman's Voice calls above the murmur.*

THE WOMAN'S VOICE

Mind ye git to tell the High Sheriff.

A MAN'S VOICE

I's on his trail now.

A BOY'S VOICE

Clim on my nag, Andy. Let's we cut acrosst Bab's Branch and fotch the Squire.

THE WOMAN'S VOICE

Betide him jist whar to come, boys.

THE BOY'S VOICE

Whar?

THE WOMAN'S VOICE

Ri'chere to Beem Sprattling's, at noonin' hour.

[*On the porch a forlorn little* WOMAN, *of a girlish comeliness now almost faded, sits listening anxiously. In her lap she drops dried yellow beans as she breaks the pods.*

*Gathering them now in her looped-up skirt, she crosses over to the gate, muttering half audible syllables of nervousness.*]

THE LITTLE WOMAN

Oh, ut-tut-tut-tut! Did-did-did-deary!

[*Pulling the gate ajar, she peeps out and calls timorously:*]

Polly-Ann! O Polly-Ann!

[*In response,* POLLY-ANN—*the woman whose voice has been heard outside—appears sturdily in the gateway, and answers.*]

POLLY-ANN

Is hit you, Arminty—breakin' beans for the dinner-pot?

ARMINTY

They's the last string left on the rafters. What's the rumpus goin' down by, Polly-Ann? What-all's lookin' to behappen?

POLLY-ANN

And *you* axin' me that!

ARMINTY

Have you seed my man, Beem, arywhar?

POLLY-ANN

*Hev* I seed him *arywhar!* Have I seed him squanderin' the trail, the grand likes of a county election, aswawpin' his proud tongue at the cabin doors, like the tide comin' over a dozen of splash-dams, and yan ole Lark Fiddler pacin' his hindsteps for a pack-mule!

ARMINTY

[*Brightening, furtively.*]

Oh! Is he fetchin' home luck at last, ye guess? He's comin', is he?

POLLY-ANN

Shore he's comin'. He's commandin' his messengers afore him into the mountains for circles of miles—away from Milk Gap to the Fork of Clover Lick. He's comin' like the glory of Jedgment, and the country risin' to him like a funeralizin'.

ARMINTY

[*Frightened again.*]

Not here? They-all ain't acomin' here?

POLLY-ANN

Yis, Sirr, they is: ri'chere is the place of assemblyin'.

ARMINTY

O did-deary! What's he ben and did now?

POLLY-ANN

He'll norate hit all here, to high noon. He's set the time and place hisself.

ARMINTY

[*Tearfully.*]

I knewed hit. I knewed hit. Hit'll be the jail-house, or the Pen, agin. Hit's nigh on twenty times he's a-ben thar afore now.

POLLY-ANN

Arminty Sprattling! Whop out sich curdlin' thoughts from the wifely breasts of ye! Give him proud welcome home, your man, and I'll bring ye a smitch o' bacon to smother in his beans.

ARMINTY

[*Seeking to detain her.*]

O Polly-Ann!

POLLY-ANN

God love ye! I'll git to be off now and publish the Noratin' to the neebors.—Bye, Arminty!

[*She hurries off. Slowly* ARMINTY *turns back;*

*sniffling, she crosses to the porch and goes in the cabin. After a moment, the gate opens, and* LARK *and* BEEM *come in,* LARK *carrying the sack over his shoulder.* BEEM *steps briskly, with a gay grandeur of self-assurance, and makes a flourishing gesture to* LARK, *as to a henchman.*]

BEEM

Sot her thar in the crib!

[LARK *lays the sack in the corn-crib, partly in view; then he stands scraping and flicking the sweat from his face and brow with the edge of his hand, while* BEEM *takes off his ragged felt hat to adjust some green mountain-laurel leaves, with which he has wreathed it.*]

LARK

Hit's hotted me, Beem,—yan five mile from Gilly's.

BEEM

Pish to them! Hit's cooled the brows of me, jist.

LARK

The Philosopher says in the Almanach, when the moon gits arunnin' with a gang o' them warm stars, hit's bound to het up the airth, evenly in A-prile.

BEEM

The stars have heftier consarnments than weather-

makin' *this* day and time.—Was hit a march of victory we steptit down the creek?

LARK

[*Glowing.*]

Ay, man; hit were the likes of Garfield marchin' through Georgie.—Ef only I'd a-hed my fiddle along!

BEEM

Did the cabins ope up their doors and give ear unto my invitationin', for the world to forgather and hear me noratin', this day?

LARK

Yea, Massy!

BEEM

I tells ye, Lark, the country of 'em is risin' to the tip o' my tongue. Yea, and the solvation of my days and years—and, Arminty, my ole woman, along of me—hit's reposin' now, sacked up yander in the corn-crib.

LARK

[*Looking at the sack, perplexed.*]

Hit's a moughty quar leetle pig in a poke you's traded thar, Beem.

[*Feeling the sack with his hand.*]

Dad bless hit now; feel her over. She fingers more like a wropped-up sample of tripe than a nature-borned, suckin' pig.

BEEM

Who said hit were nature-borned? Would I bargain my subtlehood for a common sucklin'? No-o; hit's no fleshly pig. Hit's sperritted.

LARK

Ye tell me that!

BEEM

White all-overish as driftit snow—like a ghost walkin'. Hit's an airthly instrument of the oninvisible world. Hit packs a secret in the bladder of hits eye what kin make the onseen sightly, and transmigrate pure Nothin' into Somethin'.

LARK

*How* will hit?

BEEM

[*Puffing his cheeks, blows suddenly in* LARK'S *face.*]

Kin you feel that?

LARK

[*Startled.*]

Shorely.

BEEM

But kin you see hit?

LARK

Nowise.

BEEM

What were hit?

LARK

Jist the blowed breath of ye; hit were air.

BEEM

[*Reaching out his open hand, clutches it quickly, and offers his closed hand to* LARK.]

Will ye have hit—a full fist?

[LARK *stares, as* BEEM *reopens his fist and holds his flat palm near* LARK'S *face.*]

Look at hit close; I plucked hit, right now. Kin ye *see* hit—a handful of the wind?

LARK

Nowise not; hit hain't visible.

BEEM

[*Triumphantly.*]

What-all, then, would ye bargain, Lark Fiddler, for a shoat that kin show ye the wind?—Hold! I'll declare ye what-all Beem Sprattling will bargain for yan same shoat: He'll bargain the rep of his manhood and the deefamation of woman, to the glory of God and the revelatin' of His in'ard vision to this onsightful world. For listen at me, Lark: watch, now.

[*Shutting his eyes, he turns his face upward.*]

Easy I kin stand here, with my eyes tight shet;

and easy now I kin see the whistlin' wind, walkin' betwixt us, like a sperrit in a rainbow shinin'. But lo, now, let me to open 'em up agin—these-yer eyes.

[*He opens them, and looks at* LARK.]

Whar now is yan beautied sperrit walkin'?—Faugh! Yander is jist only your ole solid face, starin' me like a dirty mule, dreenin' sweat for the ditch-flies.

LARK

[*Deeply intent.*]

I'll resk my life that's so.

BEEM

But hark yit! Let me to wash my eye now with *one* tear from the eye of yan shoat,—whipp! presty-change!—the oninvisible is visiblized. Thar I'll see as sperritted with my eyes open as shet, and the sightly wind awalkin' beside me, easy and friendly as an angel.

LARK

[*Taking out the sack and gazing on it.*]

And the likes of all that for ole Fiddler Lark to safekeep! Beem, hit's no jist trustee I am; hit's a bishop, shorely, or a high priest of Leviticus. Hit's the gold and purplish garments of Moses or Aaron I'd oughter be paradin', stid o' there-yere pants and jump-jacket.

BEEM

Never grieve ye. You'll not be long trustee.

You'll hand me over yander kerlatral, the moment I gits done defamin' Maggie.

LARK

[*Turning, in astonishment.*]

Defamin' *who?*

BEEM

Mag Maggot: Gilly's woman.

LARK

Now that is hit which mazes me. What-fur would ye defame a Godly child-bearin' wife like Maggie?

BEEM

Hit's my bargain duty. Gilly is feein' me yan retainer to git him shet of her. I'm his defamin' attorney.

LARK

Shet of her: Eh, then, ole Rhody Melindy war right. So hit's yan Goldy Shoop—

BEEM

Didn't ye watch me detectivate hit all, this mornin'! Were ye quick, or dead?

[BEEM *pauses at a sudden sound of stifled crying. After a moment, he speaks low.*]

What were that?

LARK

Somethin' quick hit were—not dead, shorely.

[*The sound recurs.* LARK *tilts his head to the sack, and mutters dubiously.*]

Yea; hit's the sack hitself.

BEEM

Oh, jist the shoat. Hit's nacherly gittin' hongry. That's why I published the hour of the Noratin' right smart for noontime—so meanwhiles the piggie mahn't starve on ye, squealin'.

LARK

[*Deeply troubled.*]

Squealin'? — Beem Sprattling, I's squantered the hills and onriddled the heavens, and harkid to the voices of nature nigh on four-score year. Ef yan squealin' were the voice of a nature-borned pig, the stars has translated hit.

BEEM

Quit your gabble. Lay it by, the poke. Yere's Arminty comin'.

[ARMINTY *comes from the cabin. She is visibly glad to see* BEEM, *but eyes him anxiously and* LARK *a bit shyly, as she draws near.*]

ARMINTY

[*To* BEEM.]

Howdy, man.

BEEM

[*Gaily.*]

Howdy, ole woman.

[*She nods to* LARK, *who sways his body with a deferent cordiality.*]

LARK

Proud to behold ye, ma'am, the face and eyes of ye!

ARMINTY

Beem, air ye back lucky?

BEEM

Arminty, hit's a day the wonderfulest to make us pretty on earth. Luck's drippin' on us, the likes of honey-dew aropin' down from the Lord's bee-gums.

ARMINTY

Hain't there nothin' drapped more heftier than honey-dew?

BEEM

[*Breaking flowers from one of the bushes.*]

*This* day hit's blooms from the lily-bush will be gittin' to bud in *your* haar; and ivy-green to growin' on *my* head.

[*Turning, he fondles her, with a kind of aloof-minded affection.*]

Tilt up, now! Holt still your pug; let that I tuck hit with these-yer lily-flowers. White, they

is, and red-pink; what-like your cheeks used to were, afore they yallered.

ARMINTY

[*Shrinking away a little.*]

They's jist only yaller beans in the pot, the last dry string. Ye've planted nary green ones yit, new in the ground.

BEEM

[*With blithe reassurance.*]

Na! Hit's the huntin' season for me: no scratchin' and plantin' yit.

ARMINTY

But you's traded your rifle-gun for thet-thar French harp, last week. What-all have ye brung home without a gun-bullet?

BEEM

Axe Lark—is I the hunter what needs ary gun-bullet to bag my game. [*He winks at* LARK.]

LARK

Nay, good woman! He's becomin' to be a mighty one in the earth. He's a Nimrod, which he hunted in the face of the Lord, with nary a hog-rifle. He's sacked up a pricely piece o' creation.

ARMINTY

[*Looking curiously.*]

Oh! Is hit thar in the sack behint ye?

[LARK—*ineffectually trying to conceal the sack with his legs—looks with dumb embarrassment at* BEEM, *who tries also to intercept his person between the meal-bag and* ARMINTY, *who questions him.*]

What's in hit?

BEEM

What's in what-all?

ARMINTY

In the mealpoke.

BEEM

[*After another exchange of pantomime with* LARK, *speaks, nonchalant.*]

Stan' by, then, Lark Fiddler. Sence you've let the cat outen your mouth, ye'd maht as well let hit outen the bag.

ARMINTY

[*Plaintively, drawing back*]

Oh, Beem! Jist a cat?

BEEM

Be patientable! Hit's no critter with claws in hits pads. Shove aside, Uncle! Unbestraddle hit.

LARK

[*Who has bestridden the sack and squatted over it, holds his ground with huge solemnity.*]

Friend Sprattling! Air ye transgressin' the sweared sanctity of my trusteedom?

BEEM

*Me?* Hit was *you* spit hit out, shorely.

LARK

Nowise didn't I! I spoke a parable, jist. I misnamed ye Nimrod. I never named the livin' resident hitself in this-yer ark of the covenant.

BEEM

So ye didn't. But anyhow she's sighted the sack, Arminty. Hit's beknownst to her. You'll never hide hit now, broodin' and settin' of hit sich-like with your rooster's rump. You'll hatch hit purely. —[*With a start.*]. Listen of hit now; hit's peepin'.

[*The stifled crying is heard again.* LARK'S *expression is torn by bewildered emotions, as he slowly removes himself from the sack and peers down at it—amid dumb silence of the three—till the sound ceases.*

ARMINTY

[*Aghast.*]

What war *that?*—O did-deary! Man, man, have ye ben kidnappin' up the creek, and is hit ransom money you's huntin', for to pay ye rent in the Penhouse agin—and me starve-waitin' ye to home by my lonesome onct more!

BEEM

[*In grand disgust and impatience.*]

Open up! Unsack hit, I tell ye! I'll belisten

no more sech wifeless onbelievin', with a hosbond of her loamin' aloft on the bright bare ridgecomb of victory—and her a-cowerin' hitself in a black bottom of tears, and the lily-flowers yit bloomin' in her pug!—Unsack hit, I says!

LARK

[*His head and arms shaking with solemnity.*]

Beem, deep friendly I warns ye. Let that I keep hit in bond. We's swear-binded to Gilly, both of us. Ricollect ye, boy. We stuck up our right, never —up pain of God's calamity—nowise to give hit revelation, ef and ontil—*ef* and *ontil,* mind ye!—your own party pledge hit's performed, prior and proper.

BEEM

Lark Fiddler, I answers ye dab back. Swear-bindin' is swear-bindin'. Man and wife is one—till they goes to gittin' shet. Arminty and me is one—evenly onbelievin' as she is! We's *one*—swear-binded in wedlock. So, then, ef *I* peeks in a sack, *she's* bound to peek with me. That's reason. —Retch me the poke!

[*He takes the sack from* LARK, *who yields it reluctantly.*]

Now, Sir, your honor Trustee, doos *that* wash your hands of me and Arminty?

LARK

[*Very dubiously.*]

Hit washes my hands—but not my sperrits.

They's droopin' for ye heavy. I tells ye finaciously, Beem, ef ye tetch them tie-strings, I'm foredoomin' ye God's calamity.

[*He turns away, muttering in gloom, as* BEEM *takes the sack to the edge of the porch and sits down there.*]

ARMINTY

[*Timorously.*]

Never tetch hit, Beem. Lay hit by yit.

BEEM

[*With a quickening smile, beckoning her beside him.*]

Arminty, leetle ole woman, fast your hand in mine. Togither us war wedlocked, and togither we's goin' to foregather the luck of this day and hour, the grand beautifulest in our wanin' moons. Git ye to fergit my high-horsin' gab, will ye, 'Minty?

ARMINTY

[*Yielding happily to his tone and caressing gesture.*]

Git ye to fergit *me* atalkin' so fearsome, Beem.

BEEM

I will. Hit's foreby. Now git ye to guess what I's brung ye home.

ARMINTY

[*Half timid again.*]

I's be sorry a guesser. Show me hit.

BEEM

Will ye have hit now—*one* livin' creation, what combines ye *three* giftes of luck for the days of your life?

ARMINTY

Three—jist in one?

BEEM

The likes of the Three Highest Names: Hit's a Trinity of holy fortune, and whitely pure as lamb's wool battled in new milk.

ARMINTY

White, is hit?

BEEM

Sperrit-white—like snow on a grave-slab, and a haunt settin' thar in the moon.—But you're not axin' me after hits three luck giftes.

ARMINTY

What air they?

BEEM

[*Sparkling.*]

Which pick will ye choose first, Minty?—An eye-bladder kin show ye the wind; or a dream-bone kin foreshadder your days to the windin'-sheet; or a wisdom-tooth, which hit kin loost ye from all on-luck the balance of your life, and hit jist clapped to your buttock: Three giftes of the shinin' sperrit,—and all on 'em packed in one shoat!

ARMINTY

[*Faintly.*]

A shoat! Did ye say—a shoat?

BEEM

[*Opening the sack, exultantly.*]

Lo and beholt hit!

[*Unwinding the red bandanna,* BEEM *discloses a swaddled baby, which he holds at arm's length —utterly spellbound.*]

ARMINTY

[*Gasping, fascinated.*]

Beem,—the babe! Hit's a *baby,* and hit fat-smilin'!

BEEM

[*In a low, husky voice.*]

Jiminy God!

LARK

[*Who has approached and squinted near, throws up both his arms, and starts back.*]

Lor be massiful! Hit's a changeling!

[*With a faint groan,* BEEM *drops the baby, and clutches his head in both hands.*]

ARMINTY

[*Screams.*]

Watch out! Ye're drappin' hit!

[*Stooping to the ground, she snatches up the baby, who cries for a moment lustily, till she soothes it, dandling.*]

Leetle poor sucklin' honey-babe, smothered in a mealpoke! Thar, thar, leetle high-bright! Purty rose o' shannon! Yis, yis, hits sorry mouth twistin' for a milk-nippy, and hits Maw losted in the mountins, and nary honey-gum to stanch hit nibblin'. Thar, now; that's more purtier; smilin' agin, princess feather!

LARK

[*Approaching* BEEM, *hesitant.*]

Hit's God's calamity. I foredoomed ye.

[BEEM *buries his head deeper.* ARMINTY *calls to him with excited embarrassment.*]

ARMINTY

Beem, see hit only—the babe: sech a blossom! War ye funnin' me, Beem, about yan shoat, for to surprise me, jist? Is hit mebbe you war remembrancin' me, for sakes of me never borndin' ye nary from my own body, and you've brung me the gift of an orphant now, or a foundlin', which hit's ben forsooken by some brought-on stranger, and you salvationed hit outen a ditch of the trail? Gin ye did, Beem, ole Uncle Fiddler never misnamed ye Nimrod. Hit's a grand good huntin' ye did, this day mornin'.

BEEM

[*Shuddering convulsively, utters a deep groan.*]

Oooh! Jiminy God!

LARK

[*Prayerfully.*]

Amen of hit!

ARMINTY

[*Suddenly terror-struck at both their expressions.*]

Beem! Never dar'st ye tell me ye kidnapped hit! Never dar'st ye! [*Hysterically.*] Man of me, cough hit out—the truth, whatever hit is!

BEEM

[*Stretching up his arms, moans loud.*]

Oooh! Crown of Jedgment, shet in your grave-tomb, and the rock yit onrolled!

ARMINTY

Hosbond! How's that you're ailin'? What is hit?

BEEM

[*Rising, with a wild stare.*]

Hit's Good Friday!

ARMINTY

[*Crying out.*]

Yea, ye done did hit, and you're gone franzy!—Kidnapped! But the Lord of Jedgment won't holp ye—nor me nuther, what'll perish with ye.—O did-deary God! And they's comin'. They's comin' from the nine creeks, huntin' of hit. They's bring-in' the High Sheriff, huntin' the kidnapped babe.

[*Pausing.*]—No-o, then! [*With swift determination, she turns toward the cabin.*] No-o! They shan't never find hit. They shan't never, never find hit!

[*She rushes into the cabin.*]

LARK

[*Pacing in agitation.*]

"So the deevils besoughted him, sayin', Ef thou cast us out, suffer us for to go away into yan herd of swine.

"And he says unto them, Go! Go, he says. And when they was come out, they's went into the herd of swine, and behold the hull herd of swine run viliantly down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters."

Beem, we sees hit in a glass darkly.

BEEM

[*Muttering, dazed.*]

An eye-bladder—a dream-bone—

LARK

What transmogrified hit?—I keeps combin' the Scriptur's and I gives ye Matthew, eight, one and thirty. So, bein' interpreted, hit mought be this-a-way: Ef a hull herd of swine kin be possessioned of a pack of deevils, one leetle shoat mought be possessioned of a baby.—Hain't that rationable?

BEEM

[*Unhearing.*]

A dream-bone and a wisdom-tooth: Hit's no wonder Gilly bescribed hit for a ghost walkin'. [*Lifting the empty sack.*] Hit's walked out into the sightless wind, without waitin' for me to mulk a tear-drap from hits eye. [*Gazing at the sack, as he slowly turns it inside out.*] The windin'-sheet of my bargain, the grave of my victory—hit's void and null; hit's empty; hit's clean robbed and disecrationed by a sucklin' babe!—Oooh, Good Friday!

[*He blows his nose on the meal-bag.*]

LARK

Hit's a fall for ye, Beem. Hit's a fall like old Adams'es.

BEEM

Yea, Fiddler. When the Lord wings ye, hit's a quick slide from the ridgecomb to the eaves-drip. I's drapped from high glory deepsome in the mire.

LARK

Yis; ye're mudfast shorely. Hit's a multitude of sinnin' has transfiggered yan shoat. Changelings hain't common with the God-fearin'. You's broke your bargain-pledge, Beem; and you elocutioned me for to betray my trusteedom. But I forgives ye the trespass. I war weakly-hearted. I war party-guilty to the humanizin' of that pig. I mistrusted hits voice in the mealpoke, at the nick time hit were changin' to a brat.

BEEM

[*Starts, looking about him suddenly.*]

Whar's Arminty tuck hit—the brought-on critter?

LARK

She's harborin' hit in her bosom. Shet hit from your thoughts.

BEEM

But I never noted hit good. I jist blinked of it—like blue smoke on a mountin. Did you prospect hit nigh-up, Lark? War hits skin white purely? War hits ears pinted? War hits eyes pinkish?

LARK

I couldn't tell ye hits inventory. I never noted hit, the scotch of a penny, savin' jist the nose.

BEEM

The nose of hit. Tell me that. Is hit snoutly? Did hit wiggle, and the leeetle hole-dimples turned outish?

LARK

Nowise hit didn't. Hit were hewed and scored humanly, and I'll tell ye this: Hits nose favors the very exaction of the nub on Maggie's brat.

BEEM

Maggie Maggot—her baby!

LARK

And *hits* nose is the whittled-down image of Gilly's, with a diffrent varnish of terbaccy.

BEEM

[*Intently.*]

Mag Maggot—her babe, ye says!

LARK

I said hit.

BEEM

[*Deep pondering—his face lit by a faintly dawning thought.*]

Hit maht be the hand of Providence!

[*The gate bursts open, and* ROOSH MAGGOT *hurries in, short of breath. Behind him* GOLDY SHOOP *starts to follow, but pauses and listens.*]

ROOSH

[*Hastening to* LARK.]

*Here* you be, then, Fiddler. Whar's the meal-poke ye brung from Uncle Gilly's?

LARK

[*Taken aback, points to the bag on the ground.*]

Yonders is hit.

ROOSH

[*Looking at it, aghast.*]

O Goshun!—I'm belated to death.

[*Lifting the sack, in slow horror.*]

Spillt in the ford—drownded, and the wild ducklin's gobbin' hits flesh.

"What will we do with hits fingers so small?
We'll take them and we'll make harp-screws."

No-o! They's pout-fishes is nibblin' hits fingers, and eel-worms the thumbs of hit. Ha! I knewed I seen hits leetle ghost thar.

BEEM

[*Approaching, intently.*]

Hits ghost!—Whar?

ROOSH

In the ford o' the creek, retchin' and rouncin' hitself, like a patch of white scum on the tide—and me and Goldy crossin' over the steppy-stones.

BEEM

White—like scum!

ROOSH

[*To* LARK.]

What-a-way did you spillt hit in the water, Uncle?

LARK

[*Astounded.*]

I never spillt hit in water.

ROOSH

No-o? On the ground, jist. War hit over a

high stone clift, and hits leetle skull were crackled like an egg at the bottom? Whar did you's bury hit?

LARK

Bury what?

ROOSH

The baby's corpse.

BEEM

[*Dumfounded.*]

Corpse!—Lark, never tell him hit were dead. Don't misdoubt me hit weren't livin' when I drapped hit. You's heerd hit squall, didn't ye? Speak out!

LARK

Shore we did, the both on us, and Arminty fashin' hit quiet. She 's safekeepin' hit now in the cabin. [*With a hushing gesture.*] Uncork your ears. Ye kin harken hit yander. Do ye mind the liltin'?

[*A faint, sudden crying is heard within, momentarily.*]

ROOSH

[*Listening.*]

Do I mind hit?—Ho, the hymn-tune of the lamb hitself! Hit's washed in the blood of salvation! Hit's resurrectioned. Hit's livin'! [*Capering.*]—Goldy, Goldy, come quick; hit's alive and squallin'.

GOLDY

Glory cr'ation!—Shall I fotch her in now?

ROOSH

Yis, yis; fotch her in; fotch in. I'll holp ye.

[*Together they bring in through the gate a bulging meal-sack and set it before* LARK *and* BEEM.]

Thar ye have her agin.

GOLDY

You jist nacherly drapped hit, gintlemen.

LARK

[*After a speechless pause.*]

Beem, air you eye-crossed like me, or is we sacked up double?

BEEM

[*Looking carefully at the sacks.*]

They's two,—and one with in'ards.

GOLDY

Roosh and me, we found hit back the trail; so we guissed you'd be missin' of hit, and brung hit along to ye.

ROOSH

Ye're plumb welcome. And, Mr. Sprattling, jist in your ear [*Taking him aside*]: Ye're as good-welcome to the better half of hit—I means, the

baby. Hit's losted, poor thingy, and needin' a rightful father to possession hit by law.

BEEM

[*Deeply intent.*]

The baby? What's hit needin', ye say?

ROOSH

A new rightly Paw, I'm tellin' ye. Listen me. S'posin' now, ef hits rightful-begotten Paw should kindly divil-dare to kidnap hit, and pack hit home in a meal-poke to hits rightly raisin'-place,—would *that* be somethin' mighty for evidence in a Dee-famation, or wouldn't hit?

BEEM

[*His eyes slowly widening.*]

Hits rightful-begotten Paw.—Glory betide!

ROOSH

Jist let that swell and sprout in ye.

[*He rejoins* GOLDY.]

We's off, gal. [*Speaks low, pointing at* BEEM.] He's swallered hit, bait and hook. When Gilly gits shet of his wife, he'll git shet of his brat, too,—and me next heir-by-law.

GOLDY

[*With feigned indifference.*]

Ye don't tell me!

ROOSH

[*To* LARK *and* BEEM.]

Luck and high livin' to ye, misters! We's be goin' now, Goldy and me. Hit's Good Friday; we's be goin' to hunt us a Gospel-preacher.

GOLDY

[*Saucily.*]

Who says we air, shore-of-yerself?

ROOSH

The Lor-God hitself of the hymn-book, Goldy. *He* says so, which has brung us through the shaddersome valley of babies' skulls, and salvationed us beside these-yer lily-bushes, by sheddin' us clean of yan shoat.

[*As they go off through the gate,* ROOSH *catches Goldy by the shoulder and kisses her. Meantime* BEEM, *with the empty sack, slowly approaches* LARK, *who has untied the full sack and peers into it.*]

LARK

A shoat, shorely, and hits snout tied in a twister. A leetle white pig—and I drapped hit behint me on the trail! Friend Beem, hit's a quar life tradin' on Good Friday.

BEEM

[*Surveying both sacks, speaks definitively.*]

Hit's twins.

LARK

[*Shrugs, with a chuckle.*]

I'd never turn a haar now at triplets.

BEEM

[*With rising gusto.*]

Hit's the twins of Jedgment, Lark. Hit's hog and human. Hit's the fleshly body and the sperritual body. Didn't I told ye hit were never jist nature-borned; didn't I?

LARK

[*Tying up the full sack.*]

Yis, boy; ye told me the bottom of hit.

BEEM

[*Sparkling.*]

Listen, then, at the top-notch of hit! One twin is kerlatral, and the t'other is evidence. Both the two are the supportin' timbers for my argyment of accusement. They holds my Noration sure plumb; hit cain't joggle now nowise. Gilly's case is won—and me seein' the wind!

LARK

Wait, wait up; ye're gittin' me tanglefooted. Which are ye holdin' for evidence? Is hit the baby?

BEEM

[*Unheeding him,—rhapsodical.*]

Hits rightful-begotten Paw—Yea, now! The mattock of God is grabblin' me; hit's grubbin' me outen the muck of humiliation, and the hand of Providence is rairin' and restorin' me back to the ridgecomb of the world. [*Calling.*]—Arminty!

LARK

Now what's crackin' your pod?

BEEM

[*Starting for the cabin.*]

Arminty!—I'll git to tell her the imagical thought. Arminty! Let me to peek one sight of hits nose.—'Minty!

[*He hurries in.* LARK *looks after him, with head shaking.*]

LARK

Spring o' the year!

[*Staring at the sacks, and scratching his head.*]

Dadburn my skelp!

[*Slowly he carries the sacks to the corncrib, just as* POLLY-ANN *comes in the gate, carrying a small bundle.*]

POLLY-ANN

[*Hailing him buxomly.*]

Mornin' thar, unladin' of your pack! How ye livin', ole mule?

[*Quickly shoving the sacks out of view in the crib,*

LARK *goes to meet her. With a beaming gaze in her face, he grasps and shakes her left hand heartily in both of his.*]

LARK

Lorda'mighty look in the eyes of her! Would hit be Polly-Ann Clemm?

POLLY-ANN

[*Gaily.*]

Why wouldn't hit, Lark Fiddler? Hain't I lookin' nacherly?

LARK

[*Laughing, and shuttling her hand.*]

Natcherly as my ole shoe, and hit losted sence Ole Christmas. Whar you ben hidin' in?

POLLY-ANN

In the shadder of the Rock of Ages, I's ahopin' of.—Whar did you losted 'Minty Sprattling's man?

LARK

[*Sobering, nods toward the cabin.*]

Beem? He's with her, to within.

POLLY-ANN

I'll step up to them.

LARK

[*Still holding her hand.*]

Why would ye, now?

POLLY-ANN

I's fetchin' 'em this-yer bacon.

LARK

[*Eyeing her bundle.*]

Bacon, is hit?

POLLY-ANN

A snack I promised Minty. They's be needin' a leetle sample of fat pig.

LARK

[*Detaining her, deep-persuasively.*]

Nowise they won't, Polly-Ann: They's double-rationed a'ready.

POLLY-ANN

Rationed? Starvationed, ye mean!

LARK

Nay, woman alive. Pig is prosperin' on these-yere premises. [*Mysteriously.*] That's a truth darksome now, but ye'll see hit brung to light before your shadder lengthens a yard-stick.

[*Outside the paling, the scratching and scuffling sounds of hooves and feet have been growing louder; and now a* MAN'S VOICE *calls out, with a shrill whoop.*]

THE VOICE OUTSIDE

Eee-ay, thar! We's comin' in. Call off your houn' dog.

POLLY-ANN

[*Calls back.*]

Th' ain't nary houn' dog. Hit's laid down and died all over. Hitch your nags to the buckeye. [*To* LARK.] Hit's neebors. They's beginnin' to foregather for the Noration.

LARK

[*Leading her ingratiatingly farther from the cabin toward the gate.*]

Let's we do them the honors, then, Polly-Ann—me and you, jist—till him and she jines us. [*Jogging her side, with a broad wink.*] I reckon us kin paar off and double-shuffle hit sightly, heigh? Balance me now, partner!

[*With a fiddling gesture, he faces her with a dance-step and twinge of huge laughter.*

*Laughing back,* POLLY-ANN *hits him with the wrapped bacon, which he snatches away from her and tosses into the corncrib.*]

POLLY-ANN

Still peddlin' m'lasses, air ye? Had be you hadn't no ole woman to home, I'd lay you was sparkin' me, Fiddler.

LARK

Would ye so! How many would ye lay, old hen? [*Scooping her arm through his.*] Quit your squawkin', and run this set with me!

[*Turning with her toward the gate, he pauses as it opens, admitting a varied group of old and young people, male and female, in mountainy garb, some with boots spurred, some barefoot, who greet them—and are themselves greeted—with jovial simplicity.*

LARK *hails them, as they enter.*]

Look-a-now! Lo what's tramplin' Godamighty's airth! Fellers alive, step in—howdy—step in. Ye're toply welcome. Take a week with us.

[*The newcomers shake hands, or nod, with various exclamations and murmurs.*

*To a keen-eyed old man, with long straggled hair,* LARK *exclaims, with hand laid on his shoulder:*]

Lor be, hit's Witty Shepheard! How's the life with ye?

WITTY

Piertly, Lark. I wouldn't swap myself livin' with nobody.—Air us timely come?

LARK

Yis, yis; ye're musterin' right in the lead.

[*To a slouch-shouldered, younger man.*]

And Reason Day! Ha, boy, I knowed ye the first word of language ye outed.

REASON

Hain't outed none yit.

LARK

[*Flourishing his hand to two girls.*]

Ruthie Madders and Peggy MacDaniel—dad-bless ye for the favorence of the flowers of Canaan wove in a bed-kiver!—Polly-Ann, what's here now! Ef here ain't ole Judy Dishman has cantered up creek like the turned wing of a swaller. Aunt Judy, we's jist orderin' the rinktum, me and Polly-Ann. We's kindly doin' the honors till the mister and madam leads off at the top. [*Greeting two others.*] Lor, Bige Baker and Delphy Boggs!—

POLLY-ANN

Yis, listen at him! Arybody mought guess he were callin' couples for a puncheon-floor reel, stid of a public Noratin'.

LARK

[*Fiddling his arm with his hand.*]

Ha! Ef I jist had Singin' Susie now!

AUNT JUDY

[*To* POLLY-ANN.]

Where's he keepin' hisself, yan Sprattling? I wouldn't miss of him a-lie-swearin' for a peck o' dollars. Hit'll be a sight, him noratin'.

WITTY SHEPHEARD

What's he makin' public?

POLLY-ANN

Eh, that's what he's hidin' in his bushel.

[LARK, *who has beckoned some young men with him toward the porch, points to some hickory stools and planks.*]

LARK

Now, fellers, will ye fetch these-yer hickory-splits, and git ye them scored planks yander. We'll make us some listenin' benches. He'll norate from the corn-crib.

[*Helping and directing,* LARK *bestirs himself setting up some improvised seats, by laying planks on hickory stools, at the left and centre.*

*During this, more mountaineers arrive, greeted by* POLL-ANN *and the others.*]

WITTY SHEPHEARD

[*To a pale man, who leans on a stick.*]

Howdy, Jasper! Fallin' off round the middle, ain't ye?

JASPER

Yis, Witty, yis. I's had the flues, and sence then ye could poke a ground-hog down my breeches.

POLLY-ANN

Mornin', Sary Jane; set ye. Come along, neebors; git ye a plank. Shore, shore, ye're all timely. Hit'll be right smart noon. I sees him acomin' now.

[*From the cabin* BEEM SPRATTLING *comes out. Pausing on the porch step, he views the scene with a look of dreamy exhilaration.*]

BEEM

[*Murmuring aloud.*]

And stound the cherubims on their thrones!

[*Hastening to him with an embarrassed air of secrecy,* LARK *speaks behind his hand to* BEEM.]

LARK

Arminty—what-all did ye tell her?

BEEM

[*Reticently.*]

She's not jist tellable. She's quar—Minty.

LARK

Is she safe-keepin' hit—the baby?

BEEM

Yis; moughty stillsome.

LARK

How will she still hit, hongry?

BEEM

She'll lay hit on Abram's bosom, she says. Her own is shrunk dry, she says.

LARK

Lor, Massy! Hain't ye seed hit?

BEEM

[*Brightening—astutely.*]

One peek were enough. Ye're plumb mistooken, Lark.—Hits nose ain't Gilly's.

LARK

No? Not Gilly Maggot's?

BEEM

How would hit, and rightful begotten? Hit'll favor another.

LARK

Whose nose *would* hit favor, then?

BEEM

I reckon I kin sight the ridgecomb when I crosses my eyes.

[*He looks quizzically at the tip of his nose.*]

LARK

[*Astounded.*]

Your own, hitself!

BEEM

[*Crypticly.*]

The top of the world ain't fur up. I follers my nose to git thar.

[*Filling his lungs, exuberantly.*]

Ha, Fiddler: hit's A-prile!

[*With a buoyant step,* BEEM *crosses to the corn-crib, mounts two of its ricketty steps, turns facing the gathered people, and calls, with a gesture silencing their murmurs of expectancy:*]

O-yeez! O-yeez! O-yeez!—Friend neebors: them words is well beknownst to all of ye what's ben to jail. They aims, ye'll ricollect, to open the ciremonies neeborly. They means, interpreted: 'O ye's what's here, heartly welcome, and shet yourselves!'

WITTY SHEPHEARD

Open her up, Mister Speaker. We's shet to be-listen ye.

LARK

[*Squatting near, with upturned gaze.*]

Amen!

BEEM

Thank ye kindsome.

[*Mounting the top step, he speaks from the doorway of the corn-crib.*]

Neebors of the Nine Gaps and the Seven Ridges! In the shadder and sanctity of yander home-palin's, me stan'in' here before ye in the moulderin' crib of my childerhood, snuffin' yit the sweet smell of yan remembrancin' lily-bushes, I takes the honor for to testify; and uply I rises to norate ye now a public confessin' of the sperrit.

MURMURS FROM THE LISTENERS

[*"Confessin' hit public!" "What will he out now?" "Hit'll be ole shame and scan'le, I wages ye."*]

LARK

[*Hushing them with both hands.*]

O-yeez, fellers! O-yeez!

BEEM

Feller people! Hit's A-prile. Ye'll grant me that for a text. But what's the sentence and meanin' of hit? Will ye have the end of my argyment first-offly? Pimeblank, then—*hit's A-prile.* So I axes ye, at the start: what *is* hit—A-prile?

What is hit when a man kicks out his firelog, and quits of his cabin smoke, and he goes crickin' his neck to the mornin' star, jist to be out under yan green timber, when the forest of leaves gits their beautifulest kiver; and the thaw-dew drippin' him, and the whip-a-will she's whippin' her last; for the day-dawn comes dawzlin'; and a wrenny-bird hollers in the high gap, and a Larry-bird evens him in the low gap; and the tides of the branch bumblin' in the bottom—yanside the sheep blawtin'; and the British-lady flies—her wings red-fire in the green; and the ground like Joseph's coat buttoned up with flower-buds; and hit's shore A-prile.

[*Pausing, with abrupt transition, he says slowly.*]

Fellers! Do ye know Maggie?

[*Sudden commotion, and a burst of murmurs from his listeners.*]

REASON DAY

[*Speaking out.*]

Which Maggie is hit?

BEEM

Her hitself they calls Maggot.

LOUDER HUBBUB AND CHATTER

[*"Her's the one." "Mag Maggot!" "I waged ye." "I were guessin' of hit," etc.*]

WITTY SHEPHEARD

Gilly's ole woman, ye're meanin'!

BEEM

No-o! Not Gilly's she ain't, nor old not never! Jist Mag, I'm meanin': young Maggie, with the face and eyes of A-prile. She were borned away-y back yander, in the ginerations of Laban the son of Nahor. Firstly-ever I sot eyes on her she were drivin' of her father's flock to the well of Rachel; and I holped her for to water the sheep of her ole Paw; and the wrenny-birds war singin'; and the world hit were all purely A-prile.

[*A chorus of loud murmurs, grunts and giggles rises from the listeners.*]

THE LISTENERS

[*"What's got him?" "Laban and Rachel—hit's disreligious." "Lie-contraptin', I calls hit."*

*"Naw, he's jist love-dittyin." "Git ye a dulcimore, Beem!" etc.*]

LARK

[*Half rising, with solemn admonishment.*]

O-yeez, thar, feller-gentries! O-yeez!

BEEM

[*Imperturbably.*]

Which, I's told ye, bein' interpreted, is *"Shet yourselves!"*—Ef you enterrupts this-yere argyment agin, brethren and sistren,—God be with ye! I quits ye right thar.

[*At this, complete silence reigns.*]

[*As* BEEM *slowly begins to speak again,* ARMINTY *appears diffidently in the cabin doorway. While she listens, she moves—unobserved by the others—very slowly across the porch floor to a pillar, drawn spellbound by what she hears* BEEM *saying.*]

Resumin' of my text, hit'll be yit A-prile, and the wrenny-birds singin', and the sheep yit suckin' at the well.

And Maggie she were lookin' me plumb in the eye-balls, and I never batted my lids. And I were lookin' her plumb back, and she never batted hern.

"Maggie," I says, "the eyes of ye are dove's eyes; the haar of ye is a gang of goats from Mount

Gilead; your teeth they's a flock of sheep that's evenly shorn; your lips is a thread of scarlet. For the likes of you I'd sarve the Deevil seven years."

"Beem," she says, "your eyes is washed with milk; the haar of ye is bushy and black as a crow-bird; your cheeks is a bed of spices and geraniums; your legs is pillars of marble, and the sockets of gold. For the likes of you," she says, "I'd quit sarvin' the ole Deevil, ef I could loost of him."

"How's that, Maggie?" I says. "You, which hit is the rose of the valley of Sharon, you hitself sarvin' ole Beelzybub?—I's bound to misdoubt ye that."

"Never don't ye misdoubt me, Beem," she says. "Hit's years seven times seven I's be yoked yit to the old Fiend to sarve him. He come agrinnin' with his gold and his hogs to my Paw's cabin; and I's sold in wedlock for to sarve him the days of my life. And he's branded me with his own lousy name, the old hog Deevil."

"What!" I says. "Never Beelzybub?"

"Nay, worser nor that," she says. "Hit's Maggot: Gilly Maggot."

[*Loud-whispered commotion, which is swiftly stifled by an arrowy glance from* BEEM'S *eye, while* ARMINTY *cowers half hidden by the pillar.*]

Feller people, when she outed that name, I were plumb transfiggered.

"Woman," I says, "air ye wallered in bondage to yan razorbacked tyrant?" I says.

"Yis, Beem," she says; "like Israel to ole Pharaoh in Egypt."

"Then I's deliver ye out of Egypt! Beholt, Maggie," I says, "the Red Sea of my heart hit's your refuge. Let that them rairin' tides sunder ye free of him forever—him and his hogs. Lo, I's lead ye forth, Maggie, to the promised land, which hit's me and you we's make hit to bloom like wild roses with the ginerations of Sprattling."

ARMINTY

[*Rising on the porch, with shrill cry.*]

Man! Beem! What ye sayin'?

BEEM

[*Turning toward her with desperate annoyance and dire entreaty.*]

Arminty, for God's love, shet ye! Will ye spile my imaginary thoughts? Will ye worm-eat the flower of my Noration, and hits petals jist onfoldin' to the world?

POLLY-ANN

Shame to ye, man! Never shet your ole woman speakin'.

LARK

[*Hushing* Polly-Ann.]

Hist of hit!

ARMINTY

[*Chokingly.*]

No-o, then, Beem! I's let the world to drabble

me, and the brashin' tongue of ye to distruct usns both.

[*Covering her face, she hastens into the cabin. The Onlookers are beginning to stir and murmur, when* LARK *rises with gestures of silence.*]

LARK

Wait up, fellers! He hain't conclusioned the end yit.

BEEM

[*Deeply disturbed, trying to collect himself.*]

She's quar-headed—Minty. [*Then, with a confidential aside to his audience.*] Hit gits her occasionly.

WITTY SHEPHEARD

Never let hit bobble ye, Mister Sprattling. Loost up agin. You kin brash hit fine—Biblish and antick, to bothways. I hain't heern no sech noratin' sence old Aunt Letty war funeralized.

BEEM

[*Acknowledging the tribute with a bow.*]

Thank ye kindsome. [*With renewed concentration.*] And resumin' of my text—hit's A-prile. "Beem," she says, Maggie says, "Beem, how kin ye sly me away from him—the old man? Gilly knows ary trail in the mountins. He'll outtrack us, walkin'."

"Maggie," I answers her, "Mag, hast thou given the horse strength? Hast thou clothéd his neck with thunder?"

"Glory be!" she says. "Have ye boughten me a nag to ride?"

"Not jist a nag," says I. "Hit's *horse* I'm talkin' —a prouncin' paar of 'ems, and they sech wonders would rip all the blue ribbons from London Fair with one flick o' their tails."

"Is mine right smart purty?" says she.

"Yourn?" says I. "Listen at me, lovey," says I: "From crest to cruppers he's the glory of King Joshuay; and from withers to fetlock he's fancy-fair for the Queen of Sheeby. And with you hitself aback of him, Maggie my dear, ye'll be the fine-prettiest sight sence the gal rid the hickory horse with a white-oak saddle."

"Quick, Beem," she says. "When kin I ride him with ye?"

"To-night," I says. "I'll fotch him to your cabin at moon-up, and the old man snorin'."

"I's be ready, Beem; jist rattle the palin's," she says.

And she quit me thar.

So I waited me daylong—and the sun drappin' slow like sorgum; till finaciously hit come dusky-dark, and the moon jist pricklin' the ridge-pines. Then I twetches my two bridles, and clos't I tromples my fine-pretty steeds nigh-on her cabin yard. Thar I reins up and rattles the palin's low. And out she comes through the lily-bushes—slim in the moon, like a shadder, and only her shift on. And

uply she springs in her saddle, and retches me her lips close to mine.

"He's snorin'," she says. "Will ye ride, Beem?"

And we rid on the rattlin' wind. And jist whar we turned of a darksome bottom, the moon hit whited the waters rairin' before us; and right thar I heerd a loud scritch—and "Maggie!" I cries, "Maggie, where are ye? Is hit you hitself?"

A WOMAN'S VOICE FROM THE LEFT

[*Answers fiercely.*]

Yis, yis, Beem Sprattling! Hit's me hitself, shorely. Ri'chere she is, Maggie. And what now the divil air ye scritchin' of my name?"

[*With these words through the gate* MAG MAGGOT *enters, dragging with her* GILLY *and* ROOSH, *and stands now facing the startled onlookers. Amongst these* LARK *rises, with shaking limbs, and cries out to* SPRATTLING, *who stands as if struck by a thunderbolt from another world.*]

LARK

Beem! Quit ye thar! Hit's Good Friday! Quit ye thar, I says, afore God strikes ye with another changeling.

WITTY SHEPHEARD

He's noratin' of ye, Maggie. [*Offering his seat.*] Take ye a cheer.

MAG

[*Ignoring the chair.*]

Noratin' of me—him! And war he noratin' of my baby?

REASON DAY

That's likely comin'.

MAG

What! Whar's he hided hit, my leetle lonesome?

[*To* Roosh, *loosing her hold of him.*]

Rooshy, whar were hit you heerd hit squallin'?

[Roosh *eludes her quickly in the crowd—where he is joined from outside by* Goldy—*while several persons begin to murmur impatiently.*]

SEVERAL ONLOOKERS

O-yeez!—Set her down!—Let him wind hit off! —Drive ahead, Beem!

[*Meantime* Beem *has gathered his wits resourcefully, and speaks now with tense and faintly smiling composure.*]

BEEM

Glorious and respectable audience,——

VOICES

Amen!

BEEM

Will ye belisten me, or Mag?

VOICES

You! You hitself!—Tetch your trigger, boy: shoot!

MAG

Is hit murder you're aimin', Beem Sprattling? Have you killt hit, my babe? Whar is hit?—Gilly, will ye make him spit out?

[*Jerked loose of her hand,* GILLY *retreats dumbly to safe distance.*]

BEEM

[*With deep suavity.*]

Friend Maggie, I's aimin' to spit when the spittin's lawful. Will ye hand me out a license for two minutes?

MAG

Will ye git to the babe in two minutes?

BEEM

[*With ingratiating over-sweetness.*]

I will, Friend Maggie.

MAG

[*Dourly.*]

Open up, then. I'll count my fingers on ye.

[*Sitting down,* MAGGIE *pulls at her fingers, with lips muttering.*]

BEEM

Feller Neebors, the long years of my Noration is whittled down to two minutes. Agin onct more hit's A-prile, and yander you behold before ye this Maggie with the dove's eyes: not now jist in her shift under the moon, but she's wastin' her kivered-up beauty now in the noontide.

[MAG *glances up sharply. Turning,* BEEM *points at* GILLY.]

And yonders, lo and behold ye the tyrant of Egypt—him what she parable-named the old Hog-Deevil; and him the same what captived her back into bondage, when she stumbled her horse in the creek-bottom and broke hits fine-pretty leg thar.

MAG

[*Pulling her fingers.*]

One minute on ye!

[*She glowers and looks down again, counting.* GILLY *also pulls at his fingers.*]

BEEM

Yit listen of me, friends: true-lover never misses the trail. Ef the gate hit's slammed, he slips a joist in the palin'. So hit were how I led fair Maggie to the promised land, and ginerated seven thar what the plagues of Egypt slew them all with the measles.

MAG

[*Jumping up.*]

How, then! What's that?

BEEM

But jist one—God praise!—hit were spared: one least one hit were spared to roost home to hits right-ful-begotten Paw; and this day mornin' *I* possessioned hit back in a mealpoke.

MAG AND GILLY

[*Together, aghast.*]

In a mealpoke!

BEEM

[*Tossing down the empty sack, which falls between* LARK *and* MAG, *points at* LARK.]

Axe *him,* the trustee.

MAG

[*Seizing up the sack, stares at* LARK.]

In *this?*

GILLY

In *that?*

LARK

[*Turning from one to the other, wrung with an agony of explanation.*]

Woman,—hit were God-delivered of a shoat! Man,—hit's Good Friday!

[*In awkward escape, he dodges off into the cabin.*]

MAG

[*Desperately fingering the sack.*]

Empty!—Hit's gone! [*Turning upon* GILLY]—

Man of me, air ye dumb? Gilly, gin ef you be a man and not a gelding, rise up now for the life and name of your baby and wife. Hain't ye harkid his deefamation—yan lie-swearer? Ram hit back in his gizzard! Feel hit—the empty mealpoke. Will ye suffer your own babe kidnapped and killt?—Gilly! Air ye lock-jawed?

[GILLY *stands collectedly silent.*]

BEEM

Witness, feller neebors: his jaws is locked.

MAG

[*Franticly.*]

But mine hain't, ye babe-stranglin' fiend.—Mine *hain't!*

[*Rushing up the corncrib steps,* MAG *grapples* BEEM *and bites him in the ear.*]

BEEM

[*Leaping down with a scream.*]

Hah! Minty! Oooh, Massiful! Minty! I's ear-bitten, shore!

MAG

[*Springing on him, knocks him to the ground, scratching and kicking.*]

Whar is hit, my babe? Dad-divil ye! My baby—my baby—Give me back hits pyore body!

[*In a jumble of hubbub, several Onlookers try to*

*pull the two apart, when out from the cabin* ARMINTY *comes flying like an arrow, darts through the uproar, grabs* MAGGIE *by the pug on her head, and pulls her away from* BEEM, *spilling her hair down.*]

ARMINTY

[*Fighting-pale, but starkly polite.*]

Mine he is! Never clinch with my man, Mrs. Maggot. Never trespass on the body of Beem.

MAG

[*Confronting her.*]

*Your* man, is he?

ARMINTY

[*With intense composure, dominating* MAG *and the scene.*]

Mine he is.

MAG

[*Laughing wildly.*]

And *me* traspassin' on *him!* Have ye heern him now norate of hit to the world—*him* traspassin' on the body of *me?*

ARMINTY

Like as not. He's a grand conqueror, Beem; but weakly in jedgment.

MAG

Jedgment? Jedgment hit'll strike ye both!

Whar's my babe, I says—and him kidnappin' hit here, to father for his own?

ARMINTY

Shorely, ma'am, hit's no kidnappin' for ary father to fotch home his own childer, for his wife to safe-keep.

MAG

What's that? Yourself, you's harborin' hit in your bosom?

ARMINTY

Would ye axe me deny my own husband and his works?—Swing to your own, Mrs. Maggot!

BEEM

[*Who has risen, bloody, hatless, and torn.*]

Minty,—my ear! Hit's hangin' halfly. Wipe off the spume of her eye-teeth.

ARMINTY

[*Tearing a strip off her dress.*]

Poor ole man!

[*Winding the cloth round his head and under his chin.*]

Come inside, and I'll git ye some blood-root.

[*She starts with him toward the cabin.*]

MAG

[*Thundering.*]

Hold ye!—both the two!

ROOSH

[*At the gate, calls loudly.*]

Fellers! Here comes the High Sheriff!

REASON DAY

Aye; hit's Dug Cheek hisself, and Squire Green Cornet along of him.

MAG

[*Exultantly.*]

Ha, Jedgment! The Sheriff hitself, and the Justice of peace, his honor! Lo, now, ye babe-thievers, watch Jedgment to strike ye, jist!

[*She turns toward the gate, as the* HIGH SHERIFF *and* SQUIRE *enter there, greeted by excited exclamations of "Come on!" "Hurry up in!" "They's packin' off," etc., from the Onlookers.*]

WITTY SHEPHEARD

[*To the* SHERIFF]

Howdy, Dug; ye're wanted.

THE SHERIFF

[*Jovially*]

Hello fellers! Who called this-yere randybooze?

OTHERS

[*Surrounding them.*]

Kidnappin', they's been.—Hit's a babe stole.—

Beem says he daddied hit.—A mealpoke!—The woman's bilin', etc.

REASON DAY

Git back, thar! Give Squire Cornet a chanct.—Mornin', Jedge!

THE SQUIRE

[*With a slow drawl.*]

What-all's the case?—Not Beem Sprattling agin?

MAG

Yis and behold! Him hitself, your honors. I demands him arrested and jailed.

THE SQUIRE

On what charge, ma'am?

MAG

He's defamin' me to the world. He's mealpoked the suckin' babe of me and my man, and hit now kidnapped and losted. Penitenture him, your honor!

THE SQUIRE

Deefamation—and kidnappin'. Hm! Double charges.

BEEM

[*Stepping forward, holding his bandaged ear.*]

Objection, Jedge! I queries her back.

THE SQUIRE

What's your query, Beem?

BEEM

I axes her man, Mr. Maggot thar, ef the babe war hisn or mine.

THE SQUIRE

Well, Gilly?

[GILLY *stares on the ground.*]

Talk up!

[GILLY *swallows several times, and is silent.*]

BEEM

You sees hit, your honor! He's struck dumb-wildered by the wonders of truth I's norated here. And so is poor Maggie.

MAG

Me! Struck dumb, is I? Ye divil, dad-burned—

THE SQUIRE

[*Peremptorily.*]

Shet, woman!

BEEM

Beggin' leave, your honor——?

THE SQUIRE

Go on.

BEEM

Thank ye kindsome. Bein' wiser nor them to the law—like yourself, Jedge—I's jist appint myself to prefer the charges for both of ems. On the one side, Mrs. Maggot here, she prays and petitions ye, Sir, for to arrest one Beem Sprattling for creeminal libel and kidnappin'. On t'other side, Mr. Maggot thar, bein' a seven-day, prayerful Christ'an, he prays and petitions your honor for to arrest one Mag Maggot, his wife, on the charge of Bible adultery—which hit's forbid in the Scriptur's. Mag and me—we humbly waits your deceesion, Squire.

THE SQUIRE

Hm! Ye're gittin' unpreecedented, Beem. This Mr. Maggot hain't spoke for hisself yit.

[*At this moment from the background—where he has come in furtively from the cabin, carrying the baby in his arms*—LARK *comes forward, deeply troubled, holding out the babe to* GILLY. *Seeing him,* MAG *gives a scream.*]

MAG

Ha! My baby!

[*She rushes to seize it, but is held back brusquely by the* SHERIFF.]

THE SHERIFF

Wait thar, yit!

MAG

Hit's livin'! Hit's smilin'! Give hit me, my babe!

THE SQUIRE

Hold your mouth, woman, ef you hopes to git hit.

LARK

[*Huskily.*]

Gilly—Mr. Maggot—proud war I, like a high-priest of Leviticus, I says, for the honor ye bestowed on me—for to be trustee of this-yere resident of the ark of our covenant. But, man, I never pondered the works of Good Friday! So, humblesome now I hands ye hit back—and my trusteedom along of hit.

MAG

Take hit, Gilly!

THE SQUIRE

Mr. Maggot, do ye claim this babe? Speak.

[GILLY *stands trembling.*]

GOLDY

[*Low, at* GILLY'S *sleeve.*]

Git shet of her, Gilly!

ROOSH

[*On his other side.*]

Count on your borned niece, Uncle.

THE SQUIRE

Speak up! I bids ye, in the name of the law.

GILLY

[*Feebly.*]

The law hit gives, and the law hit takes away. I leaves hit to the law.

MAG

[*Shrilly.*]

Ha! Dad blast ye!

THE SQUIRE

[*To* DUG CHEEK]

Dug, hit 'pears like a jury trial. [*More loudly.*] Pendin' furder investigation, hit's double arrest, Mr. Sheriff!

THE SHERIFF

Aye, your honor.

[*As* MAG *struggles in the* SHERIFF'S *hold, and* LARK *still waves the baby ineffectually for some one to take,* BEEM—*with a smile, whispering in* ARMINTY'S *ear, to calm her frightened look—stoops to pick up his laurel-bound hat bedraggled on the ground, steps close to* GILLY, and *speaks behind his hand with elated gusto*:]

BEEM

Lo, Mr. Maggot, I calls hit a grand start-off. We's gittin' shetter and shetter!

[*Proudly on his bandaged head* BEEM *puts on his laurels.*]

CURTAIN

# ACT THIRD

"One thing I'll give ye: Truth is quick, not dead; hit hain't froze solid forever; hit's seasonal."

## ACT III

*The Interior of a small Log Schoolhouse in the Mountains.*

*On the back wall, left of centre, a blackboard of shabby oilcloth. On this, above numerals and crude letterings half rubbed out, are scrawled in colored chalk the words:*

Cort in seshun This day
in Thisyere scoolhous

*At centre, against the wall, an oblong cedar box, turned upside down, is chalked on the front side:*

witness Box

*On the left wall, near a stone fireplace, is written:*

Joory over hear

*Against the right wall, a small platform, on which a hickory-split chair stands behind a battered wooden desk, on the side of which is chalked the word:*

Jedge

*On the desk lies a big, dilapidated Bible, with hasps dangling.*

*Upper right, a door, leading out-of-doors. In left and right walls, near the rafters, two small square windows.*

*On the floor, ranged at left, are plank settles—those against the wall higher-seated than the others. On the right, several stools. At the centre, a cleared space.*

*When the act opens, this rather narrow space is crowded with four couples, clamorously singing and dancing an eight-handed reel, to the contagious music of a fiddle played by old* LARK, *who stands high on the witness box, sawing away merrily with his bow, to rhythmic swayings of his towsled head and time-beating feet.*

*At the start, the dancers are coupled as follows:* BEEM *with* ARMINTY, ROOSH *with* GOLDY, WITTY SHEPHEARD *with* AUNT JUDY, REASON DAY *with* POLLY-ANN. *After each chorus the partners are changed progressively.*

*The eight dancers are surrounded by a roomful of other folk (some standing on stools and settles), who laugh and shout at the dancers, and join the chorus of the fiddle-song.*

*In contrast with this revelry, the dour figure of* MAG MAGGOT, *with back turned, sits huddled over her baby, staring in the fireplace; and, seated near her, old* GRANNY COMBS *keeps her eyes rivetted upon* GILLY, *who is intent upon cutting a quid of tobacco.*

THE COUPLES

[*Sing to their dancing.*]

*The wild goose builds in a sour-apple tree,*
*The cuckoo builds in the gyarden;*
*Ef I'd a-ben them I'd a-not a-built thar,*
*I'd a-built on the t'other side o' Jordan.*

CHORUS

[*Of all.*]

*Pull off your coat, boys, roll up your sleeves,*
*For Jordan hit's a hard road to travel, I believes.*

BEEM

[*Calling out, with a long lilt, ending with a staccato flip of the voice.*]

Cha-a-a—nge párt-ners! [*With a low bow.*] Miss Goldy, ye're the only under heaven. I axes the honor——

THE COUPLES

[*Dancing on, with partners changed.*]

*The Deevil and his Wife went out to play cards;*
*The stakes were jist only half a dollar;*
*The Deevil turned a Jack from the bottom of the pack:*
*Good God, boys, ye'd oughter heerd him holler!*

CHORUS

[*Of all.*]

*Pull off your coat, boys, roll up your sleeves,*
*For Jordan hit's a hard road to travel, I believes.*

BEEM

Cha-a-a—nge párt-ners! [*Clutching his arm in old* JUDY DISHMAN'S.] Now, Aunt Judy! Hit's hooketty-clink, hain't hit?

THE COUPLES

[*Dancing.*]

*I looked to the east and I looked to the west,*
*I looked over into Pennsylvany;*
*I sot right down in a yaller-jacket's nest*
*And I didn't git stung hardly any.*

CHORUS

[*Of all.*]

*Pull off your coat, boys, roll up your sleeves,*
*For Jordan hit's a hard road to travel, I believes.*

ALL THE COUPLES

[*With a shout.*]

Cha-a-a—nge párt-ners!

BEEM

[*Joining* POLLY-ANN.]

Polly-Ann, you examples the figger of a daughter of Jerusalem!

THE COUPLES

[*Dancing.*]

*Jonah and Goliaph went out for to fight;*
*Jonah were the biggest man a-courtin':*

*He struck him in the face with a saft bar o' soap*
*And knocked him on the t'other side o' Jordan!*

CHORUS

[*Of all.*]

*Pull off your coats, boys, roll up your sleeves,*
*For Jordan hit's a hard road to travel, I believes.*

LARK

[*Waving his fiddle-stick.*]

Gen'lemen,—we, us and hooray! I'll be saltin' my hide ef this-yere ain't the best time Sally ever seen.

WITTY SHEPHEARD

Give us another, Lark!

SEVERAL VOICES

*Hains's Bluff!—The Buck Creek Gals!—Cumberland Gap! The Old Blue Cow!*

LARK

[*Striking a chord or two.*]

Will ye have hit—this one? [*Singing creakily.*] *"The proof o' the puddin' is chawin' o' the bag"*—Hit's a dandy ditty from Long-tow!

ROOSH

How about *The Pigeon's Wing?*

LARK

Yea, boy! Hit's a live antic—a runnin' reel. Will ye have hit now?

GRANNY COMBS

[*Peevishly.*]

The Lord's shame on ye, Lark Fiddler! And you standin' thar ditty-fiddlin' on the tops of a bran'-new cedar-coffin, which hit's Reason Day has jist rinted the court for a witness box—and hit not finished yit for his own poor sick-abed Maw.

LARK

[*Looking down, startled.*]

A cedar-coffin! Massiful!

[*He scrambles to the floor.*]

REASON DAY

Shet up, Granny! Hit's rintable. Maw's livin' yit.

SEVERAL VOICES

[*Clamoring.*]

*The Pigeon's Wing! The Pigeon's Wing!* Strike her up, Fiddler!

[*The door is thrown open, and* DUG CHEEK, *the Sheriff, enters with* SQUIRE GREEN CORNET.]

DUG CHEEK

[*Calling loudly from the doorsill.*]

Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye!

[DUG *and the* SQUIRE *come down toward the desk. As they do so,* DUG *bumps against* ROOSH, *whose arm he squeezes, with a sly laugh.*]

Howdy, Roosh! Did ye pay the Jedge that-thar fee, this mornin'?

ROOSH

[*Annoyed, with a secretive gesture.*]

Shet up, Dug! I promised to work hit off in his corn-patch.

DUG CHEEK

Haw, then; better pay prompt, heigh, Jedge?

SQUIRE CORNET

Shore, boy! I charges interest on sich labors of love.—Look at him rosy-reddin' now! Aw-haw!

[*He laughs at* ROOSH, *who dodges away in the crowd.*]

DUG CHEEK

[*Standing at the centre, raises his voice and calls again.*]

O-yeez! O-yeez! O-yeez! The court of this-yer county in the Commonwealth of Kaintucky is now in session, with Hon'rable his Honor, Jedge Green Cornet, presidin'.

VOICES

Gol ram hit, Dug! Whar's the hurry-up? Git the Jedge to run a set with us.—Jist one! Come on, Squire!

SQUIRE CORNET

[*Rapping the desk with the butt of a big revolver.*]

Order in the courthouse!—Case Number One: Mag Maggot versus Beem Sprattling. The jury will step up. Set yander, boys, nigh-agin the chalk sign.

[*As the Jurers take their places,* ROOSH—*pointing at* MAG *and the Baby—sings low to* GOLDY.]

ROOSH

"The jury hangs over the rose berry!"

[*The Onlookers stand or sit about the room.* ARMINTY *joins* POLLY-ANN.]

SQUIRE CORNET

Mr. State Attorney——?

REASON DAY

[*Sitting right of centre.*]

Here, your honor.

SQUIRE CORNET

No-o! You hitself, Reason Day? I hain't seed ye settin' thar sence I were schoolmaster, and you jist a chunk knee-high to a coon-kitten. Do ye mind the time I whopped ye with the hickory for playin' hookie?

REASON DAY

I minds hit, your honor.

SQUIRE CORNET

[*Laughing reminiscently.*]

Haw, Lordygoshen! How you did squallt! [*Sobering abruptly.*] Well, Sir, who argyfies for the Deefence?

WITTY SHEPHEARD

[*Taking a stool, next to* BEEM, *left of centre.*]

Me, Jedge.

[*During what follows,* WITTY *keeps close to* BEEM, *who sits—at times, back-to—contemplating all with speculative scrutiny, uttering occasional remarks and directions to* WITTY *in low undertones.*]

SQUIRE CORNET

[*Sitting.*]

Mr. Attorneys, air the parties ready?

REASON DAY

The State is ready, your honor.

WITTY SHEPHEARD

The Deefence is ready, your honor.

SQUIRE CORNET

[*Slouching back in his chair.*]

Fire away, then. Mr. State Attorney, read the charge.

REASON DAY

[*Rising.*]

Beggin' pardon, your honor, the charge hain't writ down, but 'cordin' to my informationers, hit runs about this-a-way:

[*Clearing his throat, and clutching his hands tensely,* REASON *continues in a high-pitched monotone, stressing unctuously his Whereas's and Therefores.*]

WHERE-AS one Beem Sprattling—settin' yander—on the eighth day of A-prile, bein' Good Friday, did onlawfully sack-up and pack-off, or did cause fur to *be* sacked-up and packed-off onlawful, one sucklin' Babe—hit bein' the lawful property of one Mag Maggot, hits Maw—settin' yander—and forthrightly he did tuck hit home to daddy for hisn,

And WHERE-AS likewisely, to wit, on said eighth day of A-prile, the said Beem Sprattling did up and norate a public deefamation, aspersifyin,' impugnatin' and teetotallay nullifyin' the fair name and wifely fame of said woman, Maggie,—

NOW, THERE-FORE, be hit beknownst to all men by these what's present, that the same Mag Maggot aforesaid doos persecute, accuse, and villify to his face the self-same Beem Sprattling on the doubled-up charges, first-offly, of onlawful kidnappin', and next-offly, of onlawful Creeminal Libel.

[*Mopping his brow with his sleeve.*]

Your honor, I war never a man of much words.

[*Sitting down, limply.*]

The State rests.

MAG

[*Turning on her seat.*]

*Rests,* is hit? Git up, ye cowerin' milksopper! Ye'll not jist play hookie persecutin' *my* case.

SQUIRE CORNET

[*Rapping.*]

Quiet in the court! Let the witnesses for the State and the Deefense to rise now and I'll job-lot ye. [MAG, LARK, ROOSH, GILLY, *and* ARMINTY *rise.*]

Stick up your right, all of ye! Fast your eyes on me, whiles I minister the oath to ye, and answer me back: "I do."

[*In solemn tones*:]

You-all, and each of ye, now do humbly swear that you will tell the truth, the hull truth, and nothin' else besides but the truth (no crawlin-outs, mind ye!) in the cause now inheritin'. This you will do, so help ye God!

ALL THE WITNESSES

[*Replying.*]

I do.

SQUIRE CORNET

Buss the Bible now.—Dug, hand the huly Book round.

[*From the desk the* SQUIRE *reaches the big Bible to* DUG, *who passes it round for the witnesses to kiss; then returns it to the desk, as the* SQUIRE *calls out*:]

Air ye thar, Beem Sprattling, defendant?

BEEM

Here, your honor; and I'll witness, or not, jist as shall hit be.

SQUIRE CORNET

Shore, Beem, hit's your lawful preevileege.—
The complainin' and persecutin' witness will now take the stand.

MAG

Meanin' *me,* your honor?

[*Handing her baby to* GRANNY COMBS, MAG *steps forward, with a grim look of readiness.*]

REASON DAY

Yis, Mrs. Maggot. Take the cedar box yander.

MAG

Thanks be, Mr. Day! But I's take to no circalatin' cimetery yit—rinted, or onrinted. I's take the floor.

REASON DAY

[*Remonstrating.*]

But, your honor—

SQUIRE CORNET

The lady has the floor: leave hit to her.

MAG

Jedge, your given name maht be Green, but you's ripe in jedgment. Hit's *you* ought a-ben christened Reason, stid o' yan dough-head.

REASON DAY

[*In pompous huff.*]

Look-a-yere, woman! Give ye remember who usns be. You're the proteegee of the state o' Kaintucky, and I'm the State. How's I to protect ye, and you punchin' my face in?

MAG

Keep your face, man; hit's all in a'ready. 'Tain't yourn I's aimin' to punch. [*Turning to the* SQUIRE.] Listen me, your honor. See him settin' thar, a-curlin' his eyelashes—yan Sprattling! Will ye give me the license now, and I's paste that feller's head till moss grows on my back five foot thick afore I'll leave.

SQUIRE CORNET

[*Laughing.*]

Haw, Maggie! Ef hit were dog and bitch, now, I'd lay a dollar to a leather button on ye. But here's no bitin' bout; here's a law trial. So speak when you's axed, Mag; and shet up when you's ain't.

MAG

Who'll axe me, then?

REASON DAY

Hit's my perrogative, ma'am.

MAG

You!—Your honor, is hit *him* will axe me rightly? Why would he?

SQUIRE CORNET

Shore: why wouldn't he? He's aimin' to win his fee.—Mr. Sheriff, jist show the lady the state's fee. I left hit outside.

DUG CHEEK

[*Stepping to the door, lifts in from outside a bulging sack, which he holds up.*]

Here, lady. Hit were found on the defendant's premises, and the state confiscated hit, to pay costs of trial.

[*At sight of the sack,* LARK, BEEM, ARMINTY, GILLY, ROOSH *and* GOLDY *start, with mingled emotions.*]

MAG

[*Looking swiftly from the sack to the baby in* GRANNY'S *arms.*]

Another mealpoke! What's in hit?

SQUIRE CORNET

The winnin' prize, ma'am. Hit imburses the victorious attorney. Meanwhiles the contents is secret, till the jury finds verdict. Set hit by, Dug.

[*The* SHERIFF *puts it outdoors again.*]

REASON DAY

And now, Mrs. Maggot, will ye kindsomely answer me—yis, or no—what I axes ye?

MAG

Yis.

REASON DAY

[*Pointing at* BEEM.]

Sot your eyes on that-thar man. Is hit him you accuses of kidnappin' your babe?

MAG

Yis.

REASON DAY

Sot your eyes now on yander babe, which his honor has neeborly farmed hit out for ye to milk-feed durin' trial proceedin's.—Is that the alleged babe hitself?

MAG

Yis, dad bless hit!

REASON DAY

[*Pointing at* GILLY.]

Is him settin' thar the lawful father of hit and the lovin' hosbond of ye?

MAG

Yis, dad burn him!

REASON DAY

[*Pointing from* GILLY *to* BEEM.]

Did him and he git together, Good Friday mornin', outside your palin's?

MAG

Yis.

REASON DAY

And when he [*pointing at* BEEM] come firstly, war the babe safe to home?

MAG

Yis.

REASON DAY

And when he were gone, war the babe clean gone too?

MAG

Yis.

REASON DAY

And that-thar same mornin' did ye foller him down-creek and found your babe to his own cabin?

MAG

Yis.

REASON DAY

Thar, Mister Jurymen, gintlemen, put that in your verdict! Ef thar ain't kidnappin' in a nut-shell—

ANDY CAUDLE

[*Applauding from the jury bench.*]

Moughty piert, boy!

SEVERAL JURORS

Go hit, Reason! We're backin' ye.

REASON DAY

Thank ye. [*To* MAG.] That's all, ma'am.

MAG

[*Dumbfounded.*]

*All,* is hit?

BEEM

Shore, hit's all! He's shelled all the meat in his nut. I norated hit all myself—how I fotched the babe home in a mealpoke. The pint is, Mr. Reason, kin a father kidnap his own kid?

VOICES FROM THE JURY

Haw, haw! That cotched him nappin'! Shame, thar, shame! Scan'le to ye, Beem! Git back on him, Reason!

SQUIRE CORNET

[*Rapping the revolver.*]

Silence in the jury!—Now, Sir, Mr. Attorney for the Deefence—

WITTY SHEPHEARD

[*Rising, prompted by* BEEM.]

Jist three leetle queries, your honor!—Mrs. Maggot, on said mornin' by the palin's, did you and said Sprattling conversation together?—Yis, or No?

MAG

Yis; and the hell-fired fool begun gabbin' of secrets—

WITTY SHEPHEARD

Hold! Objection, Jedge.

SQUIRE CORNET

Objection granted. "Yis, or No," and no more, woman!

WITTY SHEPHEARD

[*Prompted again by* BEEM.]

And Mrs. Maggot! The gineral topic of your mutual conversationin' were hit—were hit the Trimbles of Love and the Darksome Secrets of Time?

MAG

"Love trimbles"—Yis: them were his same words. And ole Gilly standin' by, deef, dumb and blind as a ground-mole!

WITTY SHEPHEARD

[*After bending his ear to a whisper from* BEEM.]

Hold agin yit!—And Mrs. Maggot, were hit the said Beem Sprattling which you thanked so kindsome for showin' ye to aim the buttermilk on your hosbond's head?—Yis, or No!

MAG

Yis, then. And I hopes the buttermilk soaked in, and drownded the louses of his dirty thoughts.—Yea, Gilly Maggot, but I sees 'em squirmin' yit thar. Git shet of your wife, will ye? Keep your snoopin' eyes offen yan Goldy, the huzzy-wench!

WITTY SHEPHEARD

[*To* MAG.]

Thank ye. [*To the Jury.*] Thar, gintlemen, speakin' of deefamation, ef thar ain't a lovin', faithful wife in a nutshell! [*To the* SQUIRE.] That's all, your honor.

SQUIRE CORNET

Witness dismissed!

[*An uproar of applause, hisses and ejaculations bursts from the Jury. "Hurray for Witty!" etc.—joined in by some of the Onlookers, while —at the same time—*MAGGIE, *shouting, is being led off to her seat by the* SHERIFF.]

MAG

[*Clamorous.*]

Dismissed? Me! Dismissed! And I, which could spin 'em a tale would retch to Doomsday. Dad hackle their bones, I says!

VOICES

[*Simultaneously from the Jury.*]

Hurray for Witty Shepheard! My stakes is on you, Witty! Ye'll win the mealpoke yit.—Ssssss! Hit's onsquar! Beem put a bee in his ear. Harken to Reason, now!

SQUIRE CORNET

[*Roaring out, raises and aims his revolver.*]

Silence, in the name of the law! [*Stark silence, as*

*he slowly lowers his revolver.*] Neebors, this-yere gun don't allers aim the butt-end. Gintlemen of the Jury, hinceforward I'll axe ye to bet on the evidence a leetle grain more *eem*partially.

Next witness: Lark Fiddler to the box.

[*The* SQUIRE *keeps his hold on the revolver.*
*With a whisper to* GOLDY *and to* REASON, ROOSH *steps out of the door.*
LARK, *approaching the cedar box, pauses, moves cautiously round three sides of it, and mutters low.*]

LARK

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—!

REASON DAY

Air ye fearsome, Uncle, and hit a coffin?

LARK

[*Climbing on the box.*]

No-o, my feller alive! All clay must come to hit finaciously; we's all tromplin' the brink. Only jist, friend Reason, I'd as rather occupy hit upsydown than wrong-side-out.

REASON DAY

Shore hit's saft lined, with black lamb's wool new-carded. I hopes ye're not grutchin' me my rintal: I charges 'em three bits, and kerridge found.

LARK

Man, hit's a low bargain for cedar; yit I allers heerd the lastiest gravehouses is ches'nut.

REASON DAY

Thet's for top-ground, Lark! But considerin' beauty, and how I has to bury hit in the end—

ANDY CAUDLE

Git on thar, Reason! Is this-yere a trial or a trade-fairin'? What's the pint this state argyment handles anyhow?

REASON DAY

Beggin' pardon, Sirs!—This state argyment handles to prove said Beem Sprattling for to be a creeminal lie-swearer and defamationer, and said Mag Maggot for to be sore-injured a wife and a mother of onspeckled and virginous fidelity.

ANDY CAUDLE

I thought hit handled kidnappin'.

REASON DAY

So hit doos: hit follers bothly. I's made Beem own up the kidnappin'; so now we proceeds on to the lie-swearin'.

ANDY CAUDLE

Well, then, git a pace on the proceeds. I warns the court of hit. Ef we fellers has to set here

mouth-shet, and do our bettin' *eem*partially, we don't jurify no more'n till jest dinner-time.

[*Murmurs of assent from the Jury.*]

SQUIRE CORNET

Them's right smart sentiments, Andy. The court shares 'em hisself.—Buck up thar, Reason!

REASON DAY

Yis, your honor; I's buckin'. [*To* LARK.] Now, Uncle, you's heern the pint o' the argyment. You knows the persecutin' witness, Mag. You hitself is beknownst and respectit in the Nine Gaps for the good-heartedest, Bible-truth-tellin'dest fiddler in God's Amerikee. Now, Sir, one question: In your judeecious opinion, is Maggie a speckled virgin?

LARK

[*Catching his breath.*]

Speckled, is she? Hold, boy: let me git a start on that. Is hit law language—speckled—or is hit fowl language for the likes of hen-birds?

REASON DAY

Hit's lawful, Uncle. Bein' interpreted—Were Maggie's motherhood rightly defamed by said Spratt-ling?

LARK

Maggie—her motherhood? No, sirrree! No man kin defame Mag that-a-way. Dad bless her

soul and body, she'll farrer a cabinful, and never miss a nine-month christ'nin' party. No, Sir, gen-'lemen: Beem, nor nobody, kin speckle her record motherin'—no more'n Godamighty's wife.

REASON DAY

Will ye swear to that?

LARK

I'll stick up my foot and swear to hit: Mag's a mother,—faithful and unfalterin'.

REASON DAY

That's all, Uncle. Deferrin' to the jury, the State rests.

[*He sits down. Stifled applause from the Jury.*]

WITTY SHEPHEARD

[*Standing up.*]

Deferrin' to his honor, the Deefence rises: *Hit* don't never rest, this side o' Jordan, for the down-trod. [*To* LARK, *appealingly, with a gesture toward* BEEM.] Mr. Witness, gaze your eyes on yan down-trod! Him and you is bosom-friends of etarnity. You stands thar on the brink, exaltified; he droops here in the bottom—a worm, with the world's heel on him. Yea, Mr. Witness, the world hit casts hits spittal on him and calls him lie-swearer, defamationer. But you, Sir, what knows him, stoop now and wash him clean of them revilements with God's

truth. Answer one question to the world: Is your bosom-friend, Beem,—a liar?

LARK

A liar, it hit? And ye're axin' me the truth of that? Man, the old ancients was axin' hit afore ye. "What is hit," he says; old Pilate, he says: "What is hit—the truth?"

And overly more don't the Bible say: "Yea, let God be true and ary man a liar?"

Gen'lemen, I'm not funnin' ye. Man don't live by truth purely; ef he did, hit would cut him asunder. One thing I'll give ye: Truth is quick, not dead. Hit hain't froze solid forever; hit's seasonal. In A-prile hit runs sap and shoots hits leaves; in October hit sheds 'em.—Likewisely with lyin'.

Will ye have hit in a parable?

I has a milch cow named Truth. In A-prile, leave her grazin' the pasture grass, dad bless her, she's purty and harmless. One near blade leads to another, and so she goes strayin', till she's losted in the mountins. Then I goes trackin' her.

"Co-oop!" I calls, "Co', bossie!" till lastly I cotches her up. So I holds my pail, and retches for her dug to milk hit. Then the dad-burned critter she rounces her round and rends me in the buttocks; and off she squanters agin.

Gen'lemen! My friend Beem he's ben rended by Truth. Thar he sets on his britch, starin' after her —so purty she is! Sence he were borned he's ben tryin' for to milk her, jist to feed the leetle childun of men, to grow up by.

Well, gen'lemen, thar he sets.

Beem Sprattling a liar? No, Sir, Mr. Defendin' Attorney! Beem hain't no liar; he's a novice. A novice he's a feller don't never larn nothin' from spillt milk. A novice he's a feller don't never leave trackin' for green pastures.

BEEM

[ *Rising.*]

Friend Lark, I'll argyfy that cow with ye later, jist as quick as I wins this-yer trial. [*Sitting down.*] Keep the plank, Witty!

WITTY SHEPHEARD

Honorable Mr. Witness! Noble rings them words of ye yit in our ears. Noble ye've proved hit, Sir, —said defendant hain't no liar. So which bein' proven, hit follers like dayrise outen the dark how yander babe is lawfully hisn to daddy.

MAG

[*Glaring.*]

Hisn!

WITTY SHEPHEARD

Hain't that your conclusion, Sir?

BEEM

[*As* LARK *stands gulping.*]

Speak up, Lark.

MAG

Spit him down, Fiddler!

LARK

Hold yit, friend fellers! I wa'n't ammentatin' on no babe—inspecially hit bein' a changeling. Hit's onmortal halfly—yan babe. Hit's the puny, ghosted fruit of Good Friday.

MAG

Puny, ye says? Ghosted!—And hit suckin' the red fat of hits thumb!

WITTY SHEPHEARD

Who daddied hit—Gilly or Beem? Thar's the question, Mr. Witness.

LARK

And thar's the meestery, Mr. Attorney. Will ye have the evidence?

Well, Sir, I trusteed hit in a mealpoke. Now first-offly hit were a shoat—a sacked-up piggie. Well, gen'lemen, Gilly Maggot is wide beknownst for a master of hogs; and I leaves hit for the State to argyfy—could a hog-master daddy a shoat-baby? But, gen'lemen, hit jist deepens the mystery. For secondly, when Beem unsacked the leetle critter, hit were a babe, plumb human. So I leaves hit for the Deefence to amplicate—could Beem have a party-share in hit?

As for me, Sirs, I hain't nowise a charm-doctor

what can interprefy a changeling—and hit newborned on Good Friday. That composes my principles, your honor.

SQUIRE CORNET

And respectable, releegious principles they is, Mr. Fiddler. The court congratulates ye.—Witness dismissed!

LARK

Thanks be, your honor and gen'lemen! [*Raising his fiddle.*] And now will I tell ye goodbye on Singin' Susie?—One tune, jist?

[*A beginning of loud applause, hushed suddenly by the* SQUIRE, *rising.*]

SQUIRE CORNET

Witness dismissed, I says! Next witness: Roosh Maggot.

REASON DAY

Your honor, he's stepped out a minute, Rooshy. He'll be back, he says, in an eye-winkin'.

SQUIRE CORNET

Mr. Sheriff, git back the delinquent, quick-off.

DUG CHEEK

Yis, Sir.

[*He hurries outdoors.*]

SQUIRE CORNET

Next witness: Gilly Maggot.

GILLY

Your honor, I rises in predicament. This-yere case in session will be follered to onct by anither case, in the which I stands plaintiff agin my wife, Mag, for Babylonious behavin's with said Beem Sprattling. Conseederin' said fac', and savin' of your honor's time and the hon'rable jurymen, I prayerfully petitions your honor for to defer my deponin's till the case follerin'.

MAG

[*To* GRANNY COMBS.]

The old mildewed hog-slosh! Look at hit crawlin'.

GRANNY COMBS

And yan Shoop gal a-gigglin'!

SQUIRE CORNET

Petitioner's prayer granted. Next witness: Arminty Sprattling to the box.

[ARMINTY *riscs shyly. Escorted by* POLLY-ANN *as far as the box, she turns there to part with her.*]

POLLY-ANN

[*Leaving her with a smack on the cheek.*]

Ye're lookin' brigetty, my dear. Jist cling to the one thought. Never let 'em fash ye the heft of a goosefeather.

[ARMINTY *steps on the box, and faces the* SQUIRE, *with a bob-curtsy.*]

ARMINTY

Present, your honor.

SQUIRE CORNET

And right smart welcome, Mrs. Sprattling!

[ARMINTY *smoothes her dress, and fastens her eyes on* BEEM.]

REASON DAY

[*Rising.*]

Lady, ye've heern the conveencin' testimonials of the foregoin' witnesses, which they establishes your hosbond's guilt. What now has *you* to say to his onmatrimonious dealin's?

ARMINTY

Nothin', Sir. Beem's my man.

REASON DAY

Nothin'! Nothin' to him sheddin' ye for another up-creek man's woman?

ARMINTY

No, Sir. He never shet me. Beem's mine.

REASON DAY

Will ye foreswear your own ears, woman?—"Maggie with the dove's eyes, and haar like the goats of Mt. Gilead!"—"Maggie of the Promised Land, and hit bloomin' with the ginerations of Sprat-

tling!"—"Maggie on the fine-pretty horse, in the moon, and jist only her shift on!"—Woman! Mrs. Sprattling! Whar be your wifely virtues of revenge?

ARMINTY

[*Controlling imminent tears, turns toward the* SQUIRE *with another curtsy.*]

Your honor, the court! Beem's my man—he is.

SQUIRE CORNET

[*Jumping to his feet.*]

So he is, ma'am! I'll be hornswithered ef he ain't. [*Fingering his revolver, and focussing his eyes on* REASON DAY.] Is thar ary man here dar'st say he hain't?

REASON DAY

[*Slipping to his seat.*]

The State rests, your honor.

SQUIRE CORNET

[*Bowing gravely to* ARMINTY.]

Beem is yourn, Mrs. Sprattling. That's a court deceesion. Witness dismissed—with risin' vote of thanks from *all* assembled!

[*Everybody rises.*]

THE JURY

[*With loud applause, and a scattering of voices.*]

Hurray!—Minty and Beem! Here's to ye!

(ARMINTY *hurries down from the box. Passing* BEEM, *she murmurs with shy appeal.*]

ARMINTY

Beem——?

BEEM

[*Catching at her hand.*]

Ye done hit handsome, Minty ole woman.

[*Thanking him with her eyes,* ARMINTY *rejoins* POLLY-ANN, *just as the door swings open and the* SHERIFF *enters with* ROOSH, *who comes in with a jaunty cockiness.*]

DUG CHEEK

Yere's the delinquent, your honor. Witness were hankerin' round down-trail a piece.

SQUIRE CORNET

[*Knitting his brows at* ROOSH.]

What business were ye drivin' thar of?

ROOSH

Oh! Jist snuffin' of the A-prile air, your honor.

SQUIRE CORNET

Well, Mr. Nose-in-the-air, yan snuff is high

pricely. [*With elaborate severity.*] You're fined two day's labor in my corn-patch.

DUG CHEEK

[*With a guffaw, slapping* ROOSH *on the back.*]

Ha, Rooshy! That doubles ye your fee for this mornin'.

ROOSH

[*Tartly, in a low voice.*]

Cain't ye keep shet, Dug!

SQUIRE CORNET

Take the box, Sir. [*To* REASON DAY.] Resumin' of the state's testimony, Mr. Attorney.

[REASON *rises. Turning,* ROOSH *gives a sly wink and smile at* GOLDY, *who returns them, as he mounts the box. Meanwhile* GILLY *draws his stool nearer and speaks low to* ROOSH.]

GILLY

Now, niece. Scour the ole woman. Git me shet of her, boy. I's countin' on ye.

REASON DAY

[*To* ROOSH.]

Mr. Witness, air you kin to the Maggoty gineration?

ROOSH

Yis, sir. I's borned niece to my Uncle Gilly, and brought-on niece to Aunt Maggie.

REASON DAY

What releegion air ye?

ROOSH

Christ'an, same as them: seven day round, never lackin'.

DUG CHEEK

[*Butting in, mischievously.*]

Never lackin' to keep a Christ'an promise in a corn patch, nuther!

ROOSH

[*With a grimace of uneasy acquiescence.*]

That's right, Mr. Sheriff.

REASON DAY

[*To* Roosh.]

You knowin' said Christ'an couple your life-long, Sir, kin you attest to the constant releegious devotion betwixt 'em?

ROOSH

Yis, Sir, I's tested hit, and hit's purely gold. My Aunt Mag, for constant wifery and midwifery, is shore onmatchless in the world, and my Uncle Gilly is shore deep sanctified in hosbondry.

GILLY

[Coughs, edging nearer.]

Niece—Rooshy—

ROOSH

Yea, Sir, Mr. Attorney,—speakin' pimeblank—I hopes to foller releegiously in the ole man's foot-tracks,—

DUG CHEEK

Trackin' him releegiously home to your wife, heigh, Rooshy?

SQUIRE CORNET

Haw, haw, Dug!

GILLY

[*Rising.*]

His wife!

MAG

[*Gasping, to* GRANNY COMBS.]

His *what!*

ANDY CAUDLE

Ho, boy, air ye hitched?

ROOSH

[*Gathering himself quickly, with staggered composure.*]

Wife— shore, Andy! Yis, neebors and gintlemen,—I's tooken me a wife, which his honor the Squire tied us in wedlock, this day mornin', and I owes him one day—[*at a glance from the* SQUIRE]—*two* days' labor in his corn-patch, for clinchin' of us;—and Mr. Cheek so friendly for to witness hit.

[DUG *titters.*]

GILLY

[*Faces* ROOSH, *trembling.*]

Roosh!—And whar is she now—your wife?

ROOSH

Yander she is, Uncle Gilly,—Mrs. Goldy Shoop Maggot. [*Beckoning* GOLDY *to the box, beside him.*] And here, Sir, we hopes for the home-blessin' of our ole-devoted Uncle and Auntie, and the prosperin' wishes of our neebors.

[*A great burst of commotion greets these words.* GILLY *sits down, choking. Jurymen and neighbors spring up and hasten with extended handshakes, surrounding the young couple on the box. Rushing through these, with a loud scream of delight,* MAG MAGGOTT *pushes her way, throwing her arms round the neck of* GOLDY, *then of* ROOSH.]

MAG

Ha-a-ah, the wild lightnin' of Jedgment! Ha, the home-blessin', is hit? [*Kissing her.*] Goldy, Goldy, the dad-blessed cheeks of ye bloomin' for your hosbond! [*Kissing him.*] Ah, Rooshy, Rooshy, and you the boy gittin' me shet of a terror of tear-weepin'!—Stand aback from us, neebors.—Gilly! Come, Gilly, kiss the bride. Here's the groom wantin' a shakehand.—What's hit comin' over ye, Gilly hosbond, my dear? Is hit you're overhappied with blood-in-the-head? Air ye plumb dawzzled?

GOLDY

[*Piquantly demure.*]

I's jist a-droopin' for your blessin', Uncle Gilly.

GILLY

[*Clenching his hands, rising slowly, shuffles a few steps toward the Squire and speaks quavering.*]

Your honor, I's changed my mind. I craves for to testify *now*.—Kin I?

SQUIRE CORNET

Is hit matter pertainin', Mr. Maggot?

GILLY

[*Shaking with pent emotion.*]

Yis. Hit's God-burned pertainin'. Kin I speak up for the state?

SQUIRE CORNET

Shorely, Mr. Maggot, ef ye're aimin'—

GILLY

[*Interrupting.*]

Wait firstly, your honor.—Ef I grazes on a matter agin my own interest, hit maht be,—am I protectit?

SQUIRE CORNET

Shore, Sir; the law protects ye, ef you turns state's evidence.

GILLY

[*With biting fierceness.*]

Then I turns hit.—Clare me the box!

[*In awesome expectancy, the gathered people draw away to their seats again, while* ROOSH *and* GOLDY *quit the box, as* GILLY *mounts it with teeth gritted.*]

GOLDY

[*Exasperated, to* ROOSH.]

The divil horn him!

GILLY

Sir,—gintlemen: One saved lick is wuth two lost uns. I'll save ye furder testimony in this-yer trial. Yere's mine; I'll crap hit close.

Me aimin' for to prove the perfectit fidelity of my dear wife, Maggie, and aimin' morely to show up the depravin' rascality of yan lie-swearer, Spratt-ling,—I, Gilly Maggot, hit bein' Good Friday mornin', forninst my home palin's—did bribe said Sprattling to defame my lovin' wife to the world.

The bribin'-fee war one shoat, sacked in a meal-poke.

Rooshy, my niece, war a witness.

[*Loud commotion in the court.*]

Hark yit, about yan Rooshy!—

Roosh war livin' to my cabin.

Roosh is aimin' to heir me by law.

Roosh war rare devotioned to the baby. He'd

sing hit Rockledeby; he'd cuddle hit closerer than hits Maw.

The measles never tuck hit; but Roosh is slicker than the measles: Rooshy jist tuck hit hisself.

MAG

Him?—Rooshy! [*Turning fiercely on* ROOSH.] Ha, then, hit were *you* sacked hit off, ye thief-robber! So ye'd be heirin' the ole man indeed—*you* hitself! And Goldy Shoop in *my* shoes! Look ye never set rump on a cheer in my cabin, ye hussy. Gin ye do, hit's the bald-headed end o' the broom you'll be smartin' with thar. [*Turning to* GRANNY COMBS.]—My babe! My baby!

GILLY

Wait yit,—Mother! I's comin' down to ye.—Jist hand me my leetle heir-by-law, to hold hit.

GOLDY

[*To* ROOSH.]

Spy us a chanct to clare out o' this.

[*As* GILLY *comes down from the box,* MAG *seizes the Baby from* GRANNY COMBS *and hands it proudly to* GILLY.]

MAG

[*Beaming on it, in* GILLY'S *arms.*]

The darlin'—and hit so favorin' hits Paw!

GRANNY COMBS

[*Acidly.*]

Keep the darlin' offen his beard, Mag. The sap's dribblin'.

[ROOSH *and* GOLDY *slip into a corner.*]

REASON DAY

Your honor, that winds off the state's evidence. The State rests agin.

[*He sits down.*]

WITTY SHEPHEARD

[*Rising, with oratorical grandeur.*]

And agin lastly, your honor, the Deefence rises uply!

Gentlemen of the Commonwealth, the hour of this trial is strucken. We's clumb to the pinnacle. Testimonies has ben piled on testimonies, but whar is the evidence? Whar is hit, I axes ye; hunt me hit; whar's hit hidin'?

Gentlemen, the defendant has found hit: leetle and losted, the likes of a bantam's egg in a blade-stack. Behold, he rises to pint hit out to ye.

[WITTY *sits.*]

BEEM

[*Rises slowly, pointing one outstretched arm at* GILLY, *who still holds the baby.*]

Yander hit is.

GILLY

The babe, is hit?

BEEM

You're gittin' warm, Gilly. Jist peek the leetle spud betwixt hits eyes.

GILLY

The nose of hit?

BEEM

Yea, the nose. That, gintlemen, is the central nub of the argyment. *Hit* purely is the one evidence in the visible world.

*The nose*—is hit Gilly's, or mine?

Your honor, let the jury peek for themselves and decide hit. Let me to bloom or blight by their deceesion. Humbly I petitions your honor.

SQUIRE CORNET

Petition granted, Mr. Sprattling. Mr. Maggot, Sir, hand over the evidence to the foreman. Mr. Caudle, you and the jury will retire outdoors to conseeder the pint of the evidence, and report verdict. And whiles you're passin' out, gintlemen, jist crack a look at the central features of the contendin' parties.

MAG

[*In trepidation, as* GILLY *hands the baby to* ANDY CAUDLE.]

Watch he don't drap hit!

[*Led by* ANDY *with the baby, the Jurymen file out-*

*doors, scrutinizing* BEEM *and* GILLY *as they go. Through the open door they are partly seen, huddled around* ANDY.

*Closely following them,* ROOSH *and* GOLDY *slip toward the door.* ROOSH *speaks to her covertly.*]

ROOSH

Now, Goldy; now's our git-away for the weddin' feast. I'll show ye whar we'll griddle a roasted shoat.

GOLDY

My lips is waterin', Rooshy.

MAG

[*Seeing* GOLDY, *as they brush past her.*]

So, skitty bride! Whar ye bound?—Trapsin' after the Deevil agin, air ye?

GOLDY

No, indeedy, ma'am. [*Glancing at* GILLY.] I's leavin' him to *you,* sence he couldn't git shet of his wife.

[*She runs out with* ROOSH.]

MAG

God burn her! [*Turning to* GILLY, *who is staring after* GOLDY.] Hosbond! What-all air ye ponderin'?

GILLY

The Huly Bible, Mag. I war ponderin' ole Abram and Sary.

MAG

Yis,—and yan Hagar!

[*She turns away in a huff.*]

LARK

[*Soberly to* BEEM.]

Friend Beem, ye're stakin' on a terriblest ticklin' chanct.

BEEM

I's chanctin' on Godamighty, Fiddler.

ARMINTY

[*Gazing worriedly, speaks to* POLLY-ANN.]

Do ye think he's lookin' puny—my Beem?

POLLY-ANN

No-o, he's grand!

ARMINTY

He'll need bein' fed up, when he gits home. He's terrible for bacon.

POLLY-ANN

And I kin tell ye whar to find another smitch, Minty.

[*Several Onlookers are beginning to shuffle restively.*]

SQUIRE CORNET

[*Holding a paper, raps on the table.*]

Order!—In absence of the Jury, the court calls Case Number Two: Gilly Maggot agin Mag Maggot.

MAG

[*Turning on* GILLY.]

How's that? Will ye start hit all over—you persecutin' me?

GILLY

Your honor, I prayerfully petitions ye for to cancel yan case. I renounces hit in favor of family union.

SQUIRE CORNET

Petitioner's prayer granted: Case dismissed. [*Rising and stretching.*] Glory be!—Is thar any feller here knows a baar story?

DUG CHEEK

[*From the door, announcing.*]

The Jury, your honor!

ARMINTY

[*Faintly.*]

Oh, Polly-Ann!—

[POLLY-ANN *squeezes her hand. Led by* ANDY *with the baby, the Jurors file in solemnly, and stand amid silence.*]

SQUIRE CORNET

[*Sitting down again.*]

The charge is Creeminal Libel, Mr. Foreman.—What is your verdict?

ANDY CAUDLE

Guilty, your honor. The nose is Gilly's.

ARMINTY

[*Hurrying to* BEEM'S *Side.*]

Beem!—

MAG

Jedgment is mine, says the Lord!

ANDY CAUDLE

Mrs. Maggot, we returns ye the evidence.

[*He hands the baby to* MAG. *Then, with a low bow, he turns to* ARMINTY.]

Mrs. Sprattling, the Jury craves for to congratulate your hosband's face.

SQUIRE CORNET

Mr. Defendant, so please ye to rise.

[BEEM *rises, quietly.*]

The Jury has spoke, Sir. Hit now becomes for me, as Jedge, to pass sentence on ye. But first-offly—you bein' the most reg'lar dependablest customer of this ver court—I wants to swap ye a word acrosst the counter.

Friend Beem, Uncle Fiddler thar has named ye a novice. So ye are, but ye're an old hand at hit! Lemme see, Dug: how many times is hit we's run him in?

DUG CHEEK

Seventeen, Sir, last countin'.

SQUIRE CORNET

Hit's a raresome score, Beem; but I'd counsel ye, this heat, to close-out the runnin', and set tight on the champeenship till ye're challenged. Your leetle woman thar backs me up on that; don't ye, Miss?

ARMINTY

Jist as how Beem says, your honor.

SQUIRE CORNET

Then, Beem, I counsels ye for to say *Repintance.* Give me back that word, my boy, and hit maht go a long ways toward shortin' your rent in the Penhouse. Yis; evenly hit maht loosen ye altogither.

ARMINTY

[*Breathlessly.*]

O Beem!

SQUIRE CORNET

So answer me up! I's holdin' the balancers, weighin' hit—your sentence. What's the word on the tip-scale? Is hit *Repeat,* or *Repint?*

BEEM

[*Begins, slowly deliberate.*]

Your honor—Minty—friend neebors—hit becomes for me to answer yan text. [*With a flitting smile.*] And seein' how hit's my funeral we's celebratin', I's jist step up on the grave-box.

[*Mounting the cedar box, he glances down at it and speaks dreamily.*]

Yis! Thar's nye solider foundation I could pulpitize hit on, only lackin' a windin'-sheet.—A windin'-sheet!

[*Glancing up at them.*]

Your honor—and Gilly!—Veesions I onct war harborin' of a dream-bone, an eye-bladder, and a wisdom-tooth. But they-all is parentheetical.

*Repeat,* or *Repint!* Thar's my text now.

[*With swift directness.*]

Which-a-one will *I* do, your honor? I'll do them *both!* I'll repeat *all* I's did in the sperrit of Huly-Bible repintance.

[*Fervently.*]

Who war the of-old Great Repinter? Him hitself—the wild Baptist, John.—Note ye that, Gilly Maggot!—Runnin' and cryin' hit in the wilderness he did—"Repint ye! Repint ye!"

And meanwhiles war he raisin' hog-flesh, and eatin' of hit?

Nay, your honor, nowise! Wild honey only war he eatin, and the singin' locusts, which they sustained him of his own song *Repintance.*

[*Glowing strangely with an inward ardor, his expression becomes transfigured, and his voice deepens or heightens in tone with the lyric cadences of his varying emotion.*]

Gintlemen!—I hitself am yan John—the wild Baptist—riz up onct more to ye, from outen this-yer grave-box, for to witness aginst ye all, hog-wallered in your onveesionless sins.

Repint *ye,* feller people! Repint ye!

Come forth from your peepin' courts and your stinkin' cabins, and snuff ye the mountainy winds of the oninvisible—stare ye in the blindin' eye-ball of the Lord-a'beautiful!

Lay 'em off ye, your reekin' store-rags and your dirty robes of jedgment! Repint, and cleanse ye clean!

Baptize ye in the beautifulest rivers of imagination! Duck ye down over your eyes in the deep-stillsome waters of wonder! Baptize ye in the wells of meditation, and come ye forth naked and cleaned!

Cleaned, I says, of your hateful lovin', and your false truth-tellin', and your onfaithful faith-swappin'! Shet your ears to your law-waggin' tongues, and belisten to him ye call lie-swearer:

Gilly Maggot, I made of ye a Pharaoh in Egypt; I could a-shet ye of your sins, but ye'd liever git shet of your wife.—Well, and *now* are ye shet of her? Nah, Gilly; the law has ye by the guts.

You, Maggie!—I creationed ye in beauty,—the likes of Rachel by the well,—the likes of the

love-lady of Solomon: The eyes of ye maht have ben doves, but ye'd liever they war peckin' hens.—Well, Maggie, peck away! [*Pointing at Gilly.*] Yan's your rooster come home.

Lark Fiddler, you mought have ben Godfather to onmortal twins, but your faith bobbled, and you fell betwixt 'em.

Minty!—O Minty!—Evenly you is onrepintant. You and me, us mought have supped on wild honey from the lily-bushes of life; but you knows hit, Minty—whenever I reminds ye of lilies, you allers lures me to a smitch o' bacon!

[*With a gesture of desperation.*]

Your honor,—gintlemen!—what's I to *do* with ye all?

Repintance?—Yis!

But, your honor, hit's you-all must foller *me* to Repintance:—I follers the Oninvisible and the Onbeheerd-of!

[Beem *steps down from the box, and stares round him with unseeing eyes.*
*After a mute pause, the Squire speaks to the Sheriff.*]

SQUIRE CORNET

Dug, that tallies Eighteen.

[*Rising slowly.*]

The Defendant is hereby sentenced to six months in the state penitentiary—the same to take effect this day of our Lord in A-prile.

This court is now adjourned, si-nee di-ee!

[*These words are followed by a general clamor and shouting as the Jurors and Onlookers surround* REASON *and the Witnesses, shaking hands, etc.*]

SEVERAL VOICES

Hurray for Reason! He's won the mealpoke.—What-all's the prize?

SQUIRE CORNET

The winnin' prize is a shoat. Fetch her in, Dug,—the sack.

DUG CHEEK

[*From the doorsill.*]

She's gone, Green: Somebody's tuck her.

REASON DAY

[*In consternation.*]

Tuck my fee!—Who's tuck hit?

ANDY CAUDLE

[*At the door.*]

I spies him, Reason. He's slung hit on his back—he's a-runnin' down yander: that Rooshy, with the gal!

SQUIRE CORNET

Pinch him, Dug!

REASON DAY

I'll go shares with the first feller ketches hit.

DUG CHEEK

Come on, fellers! Hunt the shoat!

[*With a great roar, the Jurors and Neighbors rush out of doors, where their shouts of "Shoat! Shoat! Nab him! Git the pig in the poke!" etc., grow fainter and fainter, and die away.*]

GRANNY COMBS

[*Moving with Maggie toward the door, speaks to* GILLY.]

Gilly Maggot, wa'n't yan shoat yourn?

GILLY

Hit *were,* Granny, but hit *tain't.* Nothin' hain't mine now—but a wife.

MAG

[*Passing* BEEM, *taunts him.*]

Penitentured, ye jail-chinch! [*With the babe on one arm, she yanks along* GILLY *by the other.*] Come on home now,—Abram!

[*They go out.*]

POLLY-ANN

[*Following with* ARMINTY, *speaks to* BEEM.]

I's takin' her to *my* diggin's, Mr. Sprattling, on six months' leave. Yea, for keeps, maybe!

ARMINTY

[*With a sob.*]

Oh, no, Beem!

BEEM

[*Tenderly, yet half absent-minded.*]

Step outside with Polly-Ann, leetle woman. I'll jine ye thar.

ARMINTY

[*At the door.*]

Beem, man! Ef ye'd liever have wild honey—

[BEEM *waves to her—a deferent, affectionate gesture.*

*She goes out with* POLLY-ANN.

*Only* LARK *now remains behind.*

*Quickly and mysteriously, he shuts the door and turns to* BEEM.]

LARK

[*Tensely.*]

Now, friend! *Now's* the moment of your life!

BEEM

Hit is, I'm thinkin'.

LARK

Kin ye climb, boy?

BEEM

I kin fall, Fiddler.

LARK

No, no; ye mustn't.

[*Drawing him to the fireplace.*]

Up, now,—the chimney! Into hit quick, and up the stack! The sheriff's gone. When he'll come agin, I'll let-on ye've run off with Minty.—Tonight, at dusky dark, I's be layin' out with ye on the timbery hills. Boy! Ye're as good as salvationed.

[*He starts to push* BEEM *into the fireplace.*]

BEEM

[*Drawing back, quietly.*]

No-o, Lark. I knows whar there's better salvation nor that.

LARK

[*Half exasperated.*]

Whar, then?

BEEM

[*Slowly, sitting on a bench.*]

In the Pen. In the Pen hit's peaceable.

LARK

Layin' in the Penitenchery?

BEEM

Yis, Lark.—The world hit's like yan ole woman went out thar with Gilly. In the Pen, you gits shet of her. In the Pen hit's anither world thar—a fine-prettier world.

LARK

What like, then?

BEEM

[*Lifting his legs on the bench to a half-reclining posture,* BEEM *speaks, rhapsodical. While he is ceasing, from outside the distant clamor of voices is heard returning.*]

Oh, the likes of a green bottom, in A-prile: *Sich* a fine-pretty world! And the people thar is all leetle shoats, white purely, all-overish. Leetle angel shoats, they is—some sheddin' pink tears from their eye-bladders,—some pickin' of their wisdom-teeth and prophecyin'; and some, hit maht be, dancin' hind-leggy—runnin' sets on the banks o' Jordan—playin leetle fiddles with their dream-bones.

LARK

[*Delightedly intent, lifting his own fiddle to his chin.*]

Dance-fiddlin'! And mebbe could *I* lead 'em the tunes?

BEEM

[*Only half hearing.*]

Ah, yis, Fiddler: hit's thar in the Pen ye sees 'em —all the fine-pretty hankerin's of your heart.

LARK

[*Poising his fiddle-stick in mid-air, looks down at* BEEM, *with the happy sympathy of utter friendship.*]

Sees them!—But *how* doos ye?

BEEM

[*Slipping one arm under his head, smiles dreamily.*]

Oh!—Jist takin' hit easy,—and shettin' your eyes—

[*Dreamily he shuts his own.—*
*Outside the hubbub approaches the door, which is just beginning to open as the*

CURTAIN FALLS

*Finis*

# NOTES

# NOTES

## ON THE MOUNTAIN SPEECH AND SONGS OF THE PLAY

### The Speech

In the Preface, allusion has been made to the Kentucky mountain speech, or dialect, used in this play. From records made by the author at first hand, this theme might be treated in an essay of some length.

The matter doubtless has often been dealt with in books, but to what degree I am unfamiliar; for my own zest of interest and knowledge concerning it has been derived chiefly from personal experience in contact with those whose minds and speech are the source material—the mountaineers themselves. Creative experiment in kind has resulted in this play and others.

For the general reader a few comments here may be pertinent.

Immediate appeal to a listener's mind through the *ear* (not the eye) is the function of all speech which has not been counter-influenced by the inventions of literacy—printing, reading, writing, the analyses of grammar and syntax, etc.

In illiterate speech, therefore, *the immediate moment of consciousness* is the basic conditioning factor of its construction. From this arise nine-tenths of the differences in form which distinguish it from

literate speech. Not what has just been said, or what is about to be said, but *what is now saying,* becomes the thing most vital to both speaker and hearer.

Thus frequently the phrase or clause of the immediate moment is self-determined in character, with a function and logic of its own, apart from (or but loosely related to) the phrases which precede or follow it.

In such cases, the flow of speech—uncrystalized by the speaker's mind into formal sentences—remains plastic, fluidly alive, unfrozen by the "pale forecast" of *analytical* thought.

In Kentucky mountain speech, this plasticity in structure characterizes not only clauses and phrases but also individual words, wherein suffixes and prefixes remain separately mobile, as words themselves do in a phrase. So occurs the double or triple (or even quadruple) negative, both in phrases and in words, wherein no negative serves to contradict another but only to intensify it. For example: "Don't ye never nohow do hit!" (an emphatic "Don't do it!"); "innumberless" (innumerable); "oninvisible" (invisible—with an emotionally-felt emphasis). So also the double and triple comparative and superlative—*e.g.,* "more deeperer"; "the most terriblest hongriest."

So nouns, verbs, adjectives, participles, through emotional emphasis, tend plasticly to coalesce in function and assume one another's roles—*e.g.,* "I creationed ye in beauty" (*i.e.,* I made you one of the beautiful things of *creation*); "You're the inquirin'-

afterest-minded man in the county"—(*i.e.*, You're the man with the most inquisitive mind in the county).

Such constructions and words of course, have no slur of "incorrectness" in a spoken usage to which the categories of written learning are quite irrelevant: a usage which can boast the ancient pronoun "hit" in direct descent from the Anglo Saxon of "Beowulf."

Another characteristic of mountain speech is that there is no formal consistency in its usage. A given person may use various forms of the same word without realizing it.

As to pronunciation, only familiarity with the speech as actually spoken can render it rightly. The "e," for example, in "ye" (except where directly quoted from the Bible) has never the sound of the Biblical "ye" (*i.e.*, "yee"); nor the sound of the street-gamin's "yer"; but it has a pure vowel sound very similar to the "e" in Italian *"ecco," or* French *"école,"* or English "echo," spoken staccato. Or again: In "no," the vowel "o" is usually spoken as a distinct diphthong (aw-oo), sliding quickly from the "aw" to a low-pitched stress on the "oo." (So in this printed play, it is usually written "no-o.")

To try in this way to suggest the qualities of pronunciation and cadence of the mountain speech is, of course, quite impracticable on the printed page; but such suggestion is readily accomplished in the rehearsals of a play, where *spoken* exemplifications can directly appeal to the ear and be tried out by actors in their dialogue.

## The Songs

The five songs which occur in this play are all songs of the mountains. Of these, the tunes of "Wake up, little Corey," and "Corn-stalk fiddle and a shoe-string bow," as I heard them sung there, have never, I think, been published, but they have been recorded by the Neighborhood Playhouse, New York.

"The cuckoo she's a pretty bird" is given (with slight variations) as one stanza of a song entitled "Loving Nancy" in Loraine Wyman's "Lonesome Tunes" (H. W. Gray, New York), though I have heard mountaineers sing it quite unrelated to the other stanzas with which it is there associated in print.

The words of "Jordan hit's a hard road to travel" I took down from Mr. William Nolen (of Incline, Kentucky), known as "Singin' Willie," who sang it to a tune different from any I have seen published.

"Jury flower gent the rose-berry" is published in "English Folk-Songs of the Southern Appalachians," by Campbell-Sharp (Putnam's, New York), page 16, under title of "The Two Sisters."

Of these five songs, three ("Little Corey," "The Cuckoo," and "Jury Flower") are characterized in their music by the high-pitched, plaintive cadences of the Lonesome Tunes—individualistic in their nature. In contrast with these, the other two ("Corn-stalk Fiddle" and "Jordan hit's a hard road") partake, in their roisterous lilt, of the richly social, full-lunged Fiddle Songs, of which I recorded a list of more than one hundred little known

or unrecorded songs during my mountain sojourn.

The material of such dancing songs is abundant, but is swiftly passing to oblivion.

Though the former "lonesome" kind has been more often cited and published, both kinds are equally characteristic of the mountain life.

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